

# **Kabirpanth**

**till the end of the Medieval India**

**Dr. Purnendu Ranjan**

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## हदीश में कबीर

इसी प्रकार हदीश के अध्याय सूरत फुर्कानी सं. 25, आयत 52, से 59 में कहा है कि वास्तव में ;इबादइ कबीराद्ध पूजा के योग्य कबीर अल्लाह है। यह कबीर वही पूर्ण परमात्मा हैं जिसने छः दिन में सृष्टि रची तथा सातवें दिन तख्त पर जा विराजा, उसकी खबर किसी बाखबर से पूछ देखो।

हदीश को बोलने वाला अल्लाह स्वयं किसी और कबीर नामक प्रभु की तरफ संकेत कर रहा है तथा कह रहा है कि पूर्ण परमात्मा कबीर के विषय में मैं भी नहीं जानता, उसके विषय में किसी तत्वदर्शी संत ;बाखबरद्ध से पूछो।

कबीर देव ने यही कहा था कि मैं स्वयं पूर्ण परमात्मा ;अल्लाह कबीर/अकबिरद्ध हूँ। अपने स्वस्थ ज्ञान का संदेशवाहक रूप में मैं स्वयं ही आया हूँ, मुझे पहचानो। परन्तु ऐसे ही आचार्यों ने पहले भी परमेश्वर के वास्तविक ज्ञान को जनता तक नहीं जाने दिया। कहा करते थे कि कबीर तो अशिक्षित हैं, यह संस्कृत तो जानता ही नहीं, हम शिक्षित हैं। इस बात पर पहले तो भक्तजन गुमराह हो गए थे, परन्तु अब सर्व समाज शिक्षित है। इन मार्ग भ्रष्ट आचार्यों की दाल नहीं गल रही, न ही गलेगी। सल्लि अला :-

ज-स-दि मुहम्मदिन फिल् अज्सादि अल्लाहुम म सल्लि अला कबिर् ;कबीरद्ध  
मुहम्मिद फिल् कुबूरि फजाईले जिक्र  
अरबी

ਯਕ ਅਰਜ਼ ਗੁਫਤਮ ਪੇਸਿ ਤੋ ਦਰ ਗੋਸ ਕੁਨ ਕਰਤਾਰ ॥  
 ਹਕਾ ਕਬੀਰ ਕਰੀਮ ਤੂ ਬੇਐਬ ਪਰਵਦਗਾਰ ॥1॥  
 ਦੁਨੀਆ ਮੁਕਾਮੇ ਫਾਨੀ ਤਹਕੀਕ ਦਿਲ ਦਾਨੀ ॥  
 ਮਮ ਸਰ ਮੂਇ ਅਜਰਾਈਲ ਗਿਰਫਤਹ ਦਿਲ ਹੇਚਿ ਨ ਦਾਨੀ ॥1॥  
 ਰਹਾਉ ॥  
 ਜਨ ਪਿਸਰ ਪਦਰ ਬਿਰਾਦਰਾਂ ਕਸ ਨੇਸ ਦਸਤੰਗੀਰ ॥  
 ਆਖਿਰ ਬਿਅਫਤਮ ਕਸ ਨ ਦਾਰਦ ਚੂੰ ਸਵਦ ਤਕਬੀਰ ॥2॥  
 ਸਬ ਰੋਜ ਗਸਤਮ ਦਰ ਹਵਾ ਕਰਦੇਮ ਬਦੀ ਖਿਆਲ ॥  
 ਗਾਹੇ ਨ ਨੇਕੀ ਕਾਰ ਕਰਦਮ ਮਮ ਈ ਚਿਨੀ ਅਹਵਾਲ ॥3॥  
 ਬਦਬਖਤ ਹਮ ਚੁ ਬਖੀਲ ਗਾਫਿਲ ਬੇਨਜਰ ਬੇਬਾਕ ॥  
 ਨਾਨਕ ਬੁਗੋਯਦ ਜਨੁ ਤੁਰਾ ਤੇਰੇ ਚਾਕਰਾਂ ਪਾ ਖਾਕ ॥4॥1॥

\*

I transpire in your ear, beseeching you, Lord  
You are True, Great (Kabir), Merciful and perfect ||1||  
The world is evanescent; know this for sure  
Azraa-eel, the Messenger of Death, has me by the hair  
on my head,  
and yet, I am oblivious ||Reflect||  
Your wife, your children, your father, your brothers;  
none of them will be there to hold your hand.  
As I fall, and the final prayers are said for me, none shall  
rescue me. ||2||  
Day and Night, I have wandered around in greed,  
hatching evil schemes.  
Never doing good; this is my unfortunate state. ||3||  
I am ill-fated, slanderous and negligent,  
shameless and bereft of the fear of God.  
Says Nanak, I am your humble servant, the very dust of  
the feet of your servants. ||4||1||



ਸੂਰਾ ਸੋ ਪਹਿਚਾਨੀਐ ਜੁ ਲਰੈ ਫੀਨ ਕੇ ਹੇਤੁ।  
ਪੁਰਜਾ ਪੁਰਜਾ ਕਟਿ ਮਰੈ ਕਬਹੂ ਨ ਛਾਡੈ ਖੇਤੁ।

ਸੂਰਾ ਸੋ ਪਹਿਚਾਨੀਐ ਜੁ ਲਰੈ ਦੀਨ ਕੇ ਹੇਤੁ।  
ਪੁਰਜਾ ਪੁਰਜਾ ਕਟਿ ਮਰੈ ਕਬਹੂ ਨ ਛਾਡੈ ਖੇਤੁ॥

ਅਕਲਿ ਅਲਹ ਨੂਰੁ ਤੁਧਾਇਆ ਕੁਦਰਤਿ ਕੇ ਸਾਭ ਬੰਦੇ।  
ਏਕ ਨੂਰ ਤੇ ਸਾਭੁ ਜਗੁ ਤੁਧਾਇਆ ਕਤੁਨ ਭਲੇ ਕੋ ਮੰਦੇ।

ਅਵਲਿ ਅਲਹ ਨੂਰੁ ਉਪਾਇਆ ਕੁਦਰਤਿ ਕੇ ਸਭ ਬੰਦੇ॥  
ਏਕ ਨੂਰ ਤੇ ਸਭੁ ਜਗੁ ਉਪਾਇਆ ਕਉਨ ਭਲੇ ਕੋ ਮੰਦੇ॥

First, God created the Light; then, by His Creative  
Power, He made all mortal beings.  
From the One Light, the entire universe took form. So  
who is noble, and who is commoner?

## Acknowledgement

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## Introduction

This book aims at reconstructing the history of the Kabirpanth in India roughly during the Medieval period of the Indian history. The set task has thus involved taking out its obscure history shrouded in mystery and then reconstruct it on the basis of extant reliable evidences in varying conventional and un-conventional forms, mostly coming from the religious community itself, and partly as mentioned in colonial documents. While conducting the project during the last 36 months, we have covered most of the regions of my proposed study spread in almost all parts of India except extreme South. Kabirpanth, in the course of its odd 500 years of existence has expanded in several parts of the Indian sub-continent, more particularly so because the words of Kabir, the *sant* after whom the panth is named, has found resonance, at least in oral traditions, in every nook and corner of the sub-continent. Oral testimonials thus come to our rescue where there is an absence of concrete evidence about the growth of the panth. Contrary to our apprehensions, we could succeed in finding some written documents amongst the followers of Kabir themselves. Evidences in the task of reconstructing Kabirpanth history are quite substantial in number, but not as many as I had initially anticipated in the original proposal for the project.

Reconstruction of the history of the Kabirpanth has been a difficult task for the students of history as the panth itself remained deprived largely of the privilege of having a literate followings in its fold, for long, since its inception. However, as a *nirgun* devotional order, named after Kabir, the great Indian *sant*, has been in existence, at least, in some parts of the Central and North India, roughly since the sixteenth century. As per a conservative estimate by some scholars and eminent sect followers, the sect presently has not less than four million lay followers in India alone.<sup>1</sup> Apart from these, certain other neighbouring and Caribbean countries are also said to have a sizeable followers of Kabirpanth, who had begun to settle in African countries as indentured labourers largely during the early nineteenth century.<sup>2</sup> Ironically, its history, till date, is shrouded in mystery as no scholar has shown serious interest academically in the subject. Some historians have, however, recently grown interests in the sects such as the Kabirpanth as it anticipated a number of socio-religious features of the Reformation, independent of and prior to the advent of the British colonial rule, the self-proclaimed flag-bearer of modernity and had introduced certain elements of modernization and modern age way back in the sixteenth century of Europe.

We must bear in mind, at the very outset, that almost all the scholars on the Kabirpanth agree that Kabir did not found any sect. Kabirpanth was initiated by Kabir's immediate disciples. In this connection, the names of five disciples are mentioned respectfully: Bhagodas, Jagodas, Surati Gopal, Dharamdas, and Tattva and Jeeva. After the death of Kabir, Bhagodas and Jagodas, took the lead in spreading the teaching of Kabir in the surrounding areas of their birth-places. Surati Gopal and

Dharamdas began to spread his messages and led Kabirpanth centres at Kashi and *Bandhogarh* in present Uttar Pradesh and Madhya Pradesh respectively.

All the four disciples established centres of devotion which gradually began to be seen particularly by the non-Kabirpanthi scholars as the maths of the Kabirpanth as well, a term which was initially coined for denoting centres of *sagun* Shaiva and Vaishnava sects. To the majority of the Kabirpanth disciples, however, their centres of devotions are commonly known not as a 'math', but as *Sthan*, *Jagah*, *Akhara*, *Fanri*, *Gurudwara* etc.<sup>3</sup> One of the earliest centres founded by Bhagodas was at Chatiya and Barharawa located in the present west Champaran district of the west Bihar. The earliest maths founded by Jagodas were at Andharatharhi and at *Basantpur* respectively in present Madhubani and Samastipur districts in the same state. While Bhagodas spent the rest of his life at Chatiya and Barharawa, Jagodas deputed his trusted disciples to look after the math founded by him, and himself left for Cuttack in Orissa. At Cuttack, he founded another math where he stayed till his death.

The centres founded at Kashi, Bandhogarh, and Cuttack, emerged as the centers of the three chief branches (*mul Shakha*) of Kabirpanth,<sup>4</sup> whereas Dhanauti math is said to have usurped the position of the headquarters from the Chatiya-Baraharwa math and itself declared the same position for all the Bhagatahi maths in India presumably towards the mid-eighteenth century. However, the headquarters of the Jagudasi branch at Cuttack later shifted to Bidupur in Vaishali district, Bihar. These maths prospered and increased their following, while maths founded at Andharatharhi and Basantpur eventually lost their former importance. Later, a number of maths came into existence at

several other places in India including Bihar. Almost all these maths are affiliated to one of the branches of Kabirpanth. Some of them gained in importance and attained the status of Acharya *Gaddi* (the seat of Acharya).<sup>5</sup> Each branch in Kabirpanth thus designated one of its earliest maths as the Acharya *Gaddi* for the maths belonging to that branch. Apart from these national level headquarters, we also noted the rise of some regional level Acharya Gaddis. For instance in Bihar, Kabirpanth has four Acharya Gaddis situated at three places: Satmalpur math, bagicha math, and a Mahadeo math located respectively at Satmalpur, and Rosara in present Samastipur district, and Bidupur math in Vaishali district. Satmalpur math is the Acharya gaddi of all the maths associated with the Kabir-Chaura branch; Bidupur and Mahadeo maths are thus the headquarters of the Jagodasi branch and the Vachan Vanshi branch respectively. Bidupur math and Mahadeo math are in the same capacity the headquarters of all the sub-branches affiliated with the Jagodasi and Krishna Karakhi *Vachan Vanshi* branches in other parts of India. Thus, for each main branch of Kabirpanth, there are separate Acharya Gaddis. Except Mahadeo math, all these Acharya Gaddis have been in operation for almost 400 years. *Vachan Vanshi* Mahadeo math in Bihar initiated a new branch in Bihar during the early nineteenth century. Under the supervision of the Acharya Mahants of these Acharya *Gaddis*, the number of affiliated maths and disciples has steadily increased, creating an organized network of the Kabirpanth religious community in the country.

Kabirpanth, a religious organization comprising members mainly from Hindu intermediate (*shudra*) and untouchable caste (*Harijans*) struck roots in various regions of India during the

medieval times. The spread of the panth seems to have been slow till the onset of the nineteenth century. Afterwards, it gained momentum and came to attract members from various sections of the depressed social classes. The numbers of its followers and its monastic institution began to increase in almost all parts of these regions. Kabirpanth established itself as a significant socio-religious movement and came to challenge some of the fundamental Principles of Brahmanism in the region. Appearance of the Kabirpanth in the caste-organized society provides the entry point in this study. It seems that Kabirpanth found some socio-religious conditions favourable to its growth in the pre-colonial period. Later, certain developments during the colonial period also encouraged the development of the Kabirpanth movement.

The entry of Kabirpanth in the region seems to have been facilitated by some favourable conditions particularly in the socio-religious sphere during the period. Among these factors, the existence of a numbers of towns, and a sustained tradition of heterodoxy were most important. That towns were important is evident from the fact that these followers founded their earliest maths at or near some of the urban centers then emerging in the medieval time. Further, the prevailing tradition of heterodoxy, beginning with Buddhism, might have enhanced the acceptability of Kabirpanth, particularly among the socially deprived sections of the community.

Some historians, who have studied the rise and growth of medieval bhakti sect in various parts of north India, have found urban centres, in general, congenial to their establishment and growth. According to Irfan Habib and Satish Chandra,<sup>6</sup> medieval bhakti sects found a ready following among some sections of



urban dwellers, particularly the artisans and lower castes who responded favourably to the critique of the caste system by bhakti sects, as most of them suffered the contempt of both high-caste Hindus and upper class Muslims.

Both these historians further emphasize the importance of common elements in the beliefs and practices of Islam, specifically of the sufis, and earlier devotional cults.<sup>7</sup> In fact, before the growth of medieval bhakti sects, religious views of the Islamic theologians and sufis had spread various parts of north India. Among the Hindus, several devotional cults had been active. While orthodox Islamic belief had relatively stronger support in the urban areas, the sufis and the devotional cults had gained widespread popularity among the rural masses apart from urban populace. Their common beliefs and practices thus kept the tradition of heterodoxy alive and in circulation in the rural as well as urban areas.

Islam was opposed to idolatry and considered Hindu temples as symbols of an archaic religion. Its emphasis on monotheism and brotherhood of its followers had much similarity with the pre-Islamic heterodox sects; such as, the Nathpathis and the Tantrics. To the *nirguna* bhakti sects,<sup>8</sup> the Islamic contempt for idol-worship might have been particularly appealing, as these also discouraged idol-worship.

The sufis, who came to India along with Islam, believed in the need to unite with God by means of love. They also glorified the role of the *pir*, somewhat similar to that of the Hindu guru, at the initial stage of the religious pursuit. At times, an order was formed under a *pir*, and its members were popularly called faqirs or dervishis.<sup>9</sup> Their *khanqahs* had become widely popular among the Hindus as well.

Among the Hindus, The Nathpanthi yogis and the *tantrics* represented two distinct religious traditions that had been in sympathy with the heterodox beliefs and practices. According to Charlotte Vaudeville,

The so-called *Nirguni* bhakti, whose chief exponent was Kabir appears to be so heavily indebted to the Nathpanthis form of yoga that Kabir's saying can hardly be understood without reference to it....the imagery and vocabulary peculiar to tantric Yoga provide Him with a system of ready symbols which were certainly charged with much prestige and A real power of suggestion for mass of his Listeners...<sup>10</sup>

The Nathpanthis and the tantrics accepted followers without consideration of their castes. They denounced the religious texts of Brahmanism and discouraged idol-worship. The belief of the Nathpanthis in particular coalesced at many points with those of the medieval bhakti sects. It should therefore be not surprising if some of the Nathpanthis *siddhas* later figured in the Kabirpanth myths.<sup>11</sup>

The older devotional cults were by no means homogeneous in their beliefs and practices. But almost all of these disregarded caste, at least in principal, and thus could attract those who were at the lower rung of the caste hierarchy. However, at the operational level, the popularity of these cults could not make substantial difference in the stranglehold of caste in contemporary Hindu society. Their main contribution to the rise

and growth of medieval bhakti sects lay in making the idea of devotion popular.

Medieval historians have found that many of these conditions were prevalent in this region during the pre-colonial times in the seventeenth century. For instance, Radhakrishna Chaudhary has shown that there had been a number of flourishing towns in this region; such as, Bhaur, Bidupur, Darbhanga, Hajipur, Lalganj, Puraea, Rosara and Samastipur (Samsuddinpur).<sup>12</sup> Members of the aristocracy, artisans and *banias* belonging to both Muslim and Hindus religions, had acquired position of prominence in this urban centers.

By the seventeenth century, Islamic beliefs and practices had widely spread in and around the region. Muslim nobles were settled in town and conversion of Hindus and Islam had become a matter of serious concern for the Brahmanical orthodoxy. In the political sphere, Muslim rule had come to exercise its dominance over the large and influential Hindu estates: such as; Darbhanga raj, Bettiah raj in present Bihar, Kashi raj, and Bansi raj in Uttar Pradesh, *Bandhogarh* raj or Rewa raj, and Hayhay raj in the present Madhya Pradesh and Chhattisgarh which had been some of the resourceful patrons of the Brahmanism in their respective regions.<sup>13</sup> Gradual subservience of these rajs to the expanding Mughal rule these must have temporarily undermined the authority of Brahmanism.

The *sufi* saints had also settled at some places in the rural areas. We have the evidence for, at least, two *sufi* centers active in north Bihar including Mithila. The study of A.H.Askari<sup>14</sup> shows that there had been a popular center of *shuttari* *sufi silsila* near Muzaffarpur. Another center at Siwan also drew large gatherings of both Hindus and Muslims from the nearby areas.

A number of devotional cults were active among the Hindus in this region during the period. The most notable among these were *Jagga* and *Chartaria*. The popularity of devotional cults attracted literary figures of medieval times.<sup>15</sup> In many sections of the society, the worship of *vaishnava* divinities continued to prevail. These traditional religious beliefs and practices were being increasingly influenced by the idea of devotion. Ramanandi panth, a *sagun* devotional sect, began to spread in this region around this period, and it drew following mainly from those upper caste member who were inclined towards the earlier devotional cults.

Besides, a number of other religious groups such as the Nathpanthis and the *tantrics*, the *tapasis* and the *yogis* had also gained in popularity among Hindus.<sup>16</sup> Katyayanisthan, Jajayamagala, Uchchaitha, Janakpurdham presently in Nepal, Chamundasthan, had emerged as the center of *tantric* practices.<sup>17</sup> The worship of *chandi*, *tara*, *kali*, and *durga* had become popular among various sections of society, especially among the lower castes.

Thus, it appears that in the initial stage, Kabirpanth was helped by a number of factors that contributed to the growth of the medieval bhakti sects in other parts of north India. Its followers founded their earliest maths at or near the existing in the urban centers. Denunciation of caste and idol-worship as religious ideals were made known by Islamic theologians, sufi saints, Nathpanthi siddhas and tantrics practitioners, Further, the idea of devotion as a mode of union with God was popularised by the preaching of the earlier devotional cults. The Kabirpanth rejection of Brahmanical priest, scriptures, caste region structure of the society, and idolatry helped to distinguish these followers

from the Ramanandipanth, a competing bhakti sect, which drew followers primarily from the upper castes and won the favour of *raja* and many other big zamindars in various parts of India. It should be noted that there is a tendency to be overly schematic when describing the sectarian dimensions of monasticism. Such a tendency should be carefully qualified if not avoided outright. It is best to understand *vaishnava*, *shaiva*, and shakta as terms that refer to distinct yet overlapping, and evolving systems of religious meaning with broad popular appeal that have been drawn upon in varying degrees by thinkers over the past millennium. Two extremely important figures were Shankaracharya and Ramanujacharya, each of whom is remembered to have identified in complex metaphysical and epistemological discourses the most efficacious way of perceiving divine truth(s).<sup>18</sup> They themselves have long been associated with or, perhaps more precisely, been thought of as founders of major monastic communities with distinct sectarian (*shaiva* as opposed to *vaishnava*) dimensions. However, while Shankaracharya's status as the founder of the Dasnami order has remained unquestioned by Dasnami sanyasis, Ramanujacharya's status as a formative figure in the Ramanandi *sampraday* has been a matter of major contention, particularly in this century- a contention best symbolized by the very name that has come to be associated (even as early as the eighteenth century) with the monastic community that for many years viewed Ramanujacharya with great reverence. The examination of the history of this contentious movement in the Ramanandi *Sapraday*, and of the socially radical understanding of the life of the fourteenth century Ramanand that was re-crystallizing at this time has been studied in details by William R. Pinch<sup>19</sup>. What

is important to recognize here is the manner in which individual monks were able to endow the doctrinal tenets and social philosophies of their orders with wider Indic meanings.

Amidst these conditions, Kabirpanth, which believed in Kabir's preachings and egalitarian social values, appeared and founded its independent religious centers in the region. It sought its followings from both Hindu and Muslim communities, although the founders of its earliest maths mostly came from the Hindu. They emphasized simple living and preached devotion to Kabir as the only true path of salvation. By rejecting the significance of renunciation, upheld by the Shaiva *tapsis* and the vaishnava *vairagis*, the panth created its distinct image and dissociated itself from the *sagun* devotional religious traditions popular in the region.

The basic hypothesis of this study is that the oppressed social group in various parts of India became attracted to the teachings of Kabir because these contain a strong element of dissent against the hierarchical caste society. Primarily the intermediate castes and even a small number of Muslims became members of the panth, which flourished under the guidance of its institutional base-the maths. Consequently, the Brahmins and other upper castes in general stayed away from Kabirpanth.

Moreover, it is pertinent to bear in mind the acute paucity of sources one encounters in the study of a religious sect; such as, the Kabirpanth, which predominantly has oral traditions and a huge mass following coming mainly from illiterate or semi-literate sections of the society. The study of such a sect necessarily has to be based on unwritten and unconventional sources which, in my ongoing study has been the Guru- Pranali (the genealogy of the Gurus), *Samadhis* (mounds of the dead

Guru or Mahants), and a few eighteenth century texts in the forms of the *Sanad*, *dan-patra* (donation-paper), the judicial and the revenue documents, a few manuscripts, and, above all, on the prevailing oral traditions. However, frequently quoted accounts of Abul Fazl<sup>20</sup> as well as the travelogue of Tavernier<sup>21</sup> have also lent support to the oral accounts about its formative phase. In addition to these, for accounts of the Kabirpanth in between the mid-eighteenth and the mid- 20th century, I have used notes of Marco della Tomba, a Capuchin monk of Italy, colonial surveys of Francis Buchanan Hamilton, William Crooke, RV Russel and Hira Lal; and also scholarly works of H.H. Wilson, G. H. Westcott and F. E. Keay. I could also get some valuable numerical data about the panth in the British decennial censuses from 1872 onwards.

However, I have largely drawn upon some Urdu and *Persian* documents to reconstruct history of the Kabirpanth during sixteenth and seventeenth centuries. We have stumbled upon these documents while conducting the field works, and, after a lot of persuasions, we could succeed in collecting these from the concerned Mahants. These documents are preserved as *sanads* at some maths, while at others, preserved as revenue documents, which they don't really tend to share with. I have attached most of those medieval documents as appendices at the end of the present report. These sources are also added by some donation papers of the eighteenth centuries, and litigation suits of the 19<sup>th</sup> and 20<sup>th</sup> centuries, which we could collect from a few maths and eminent disciples residing in various parts of India.

Another type of source in this study has been unconventional in nature popularly known the *Samadhi*.<sup>22</sup> A *Samadhi* preserved

commonly in a room or within the inner-courtyard of the math has been a predominant feature of a Kabirpanth math in general all over India. Some of the early maths, particularly those which could not keep or maintain written genealogy of succeeding Mahants in order, usually count the number of *Samadhi* as an indicator of their oldness in time. These *Samadhis*, to me, have emerged as verifying evidence /alternative to check the veracity of available written evidences.

As the present study covers varying linguistic zones of India, the source materials I collected and rely upon are written in various languages: Kaithi, Urdu, *Persian*, English, Hindi, Gujarati, Punjabi, Nepali, Telgu, Kannad, Marathi, Sanskrit and Bengali.

## PRIMARY SOURCES

The study of the Kabirpanth has to be largely based on oral testimony as the panth has not preserved written records necessary for a historical study. The panth has a large number of devotional texts which have been used by scholars of different disciplines to discuss the socio-religious contexts, are not of much use. Kabirpanth was, nonetheless, never close to the political authority, which may partially explain the paucity of written records of its activities.

However, some of the old maths has preserved a particular kind of documents called *sanads* (land certificates) these are invariably written in *Persian* language. A few Mahants<sup>23</sup> have got parts of some *sanads* translated into Hindi for their own purpose. A *sanad* usually tells us the name of the donour of the land and the donee maths and Mahants. It also contains the area of the donated land and the date on which the *sanads* were issued. I



have used *sanads* as the evidence for the existence of the concerned math during the period when these were issued. Some scholars<sup>24</sup> have examined the *guru-pranalis* of a few maths situated in other parts of north India. On the basis of these, they have estimated that 25 years a math has been in existence. During my field trip, I also noted that members of the *panth* traditionally subscribe to the belief of 25 years being the average tenure of the Mahants. To enhance their reliability, I have taken all measures to verify these information with the *Guru-Pranali* (the genealogy of Mahants)<sup>25</sup> of a math and other available sources.

On checking some of the *Guru-pranalis*,<sup>26</sup> I also arrived at the same conclusion. It suggests that if a *Guru-pranali* has had ten Mahants in its list, the concerned math be taken for in existence for at least 250 years. A well-documented *Guru-pranali* gives us a lot of other information; such as, the name of the founder Mahants and his Guru, the location of the first math etc. I have placed the maths having ten and more Mahants in the category of the pre-colonial maths of the panth. This way, *sanads* and *Guru-pranalis* supplement each other and offer us a fair idea of the antiquity of Kabirpanth maths and thus help us in reconstructing their history.

Among the sources which enable us to delineate the spread of Kabirpanth, the lists of sub-branches preserved at some of the Acharya-Gaddis<sup>27</sup> are equally valuable. These lists are mostly hand-written. When such a list is not available the current Acharya or concerned Mahants dictates the names of the maths affiliated to their branch.

Field work has proved to be of tremendous value for this project. I could attempt to understand the process of interaction

between the followers of the panth and the mainstream on the basis of disciples' memory. I also noted that the growth of Kabirpanth had passed through different phases. My description of the pattern and the process involved in the expansion of Kabirpanth is entirely based on the responses of these disciples. They also recalled how caste and family relationship played a significant role in its growth. The internal differences and resulting feuds within the panth also came to my knowledge through these interviews.

Oral tradition in Kabirpanth is evidently important and its reliability can be judged from the manner in which the disciples recounted the events. It seems as if the information has been passed down from one generation to another. However, we verified this information from different groups of the people spread over many villages. Finally, I have accepted only those oral traditions which could be verified from more than one source.

Apart from field materials, informations on Kabirpanth have been obtained from the writings of the British officials who conducted surveys in north Bihar in the nineteenth century. For instance, Buchanan's survey<sup>28</sup> contains copious information on several aspects of north Indian society in the early decades of the nineteenth century including on the general condition of Kabirpanth in north-eastern district of Bihar. Buchanan's survey is a first-hand accounts which helps us to reconstruct the history of Kabirpanth during this period. Buchanan noted that almost 100 maths were active in Purnea district alone, which gives us an idea of the extent of the spread of the panth, and that, in area which was almost 100 kms. away from any of the Acharya *Gaddis*. He observed that these maths were of 'recent origin',<sup>29</sup> thereby

indicating that Kabirpanth had begun to expand its base in the region by the turn of the nineteenth century.

The census reports, prepared by the colonial government from the late nineteenth century, do not tell us much about the Hindu sects. The unrealistically small number of Kabirpanthis, given in the first census of the then Bengal province,<sup>30</sup> does not seem to be accurate in view of Buchanan's description of Purnea district alone in the early nineteenth century. This miscalculation was perhaps due to the fact that the census officials<sup>31</sup> considered Kabirpanthis to those followers alone, who entered Kabirpanth as their 'religion' in the given column of the enumeration form provided to them for the survey by the census department. It seems that most of the followers of different Hindu sects like kabirpanthis entered 'Hindu' as their religion in the enumeration form, instead of the name of the sect to which he belonged. Yet in the first census of the British India conducted in 1872, census officials described Kabirpanth as a sect which did not admit of caste differentiation. In the following census of the Bengal province, they cited political insignificance of these sects being the main factor for excluding Hindu sects from the census survey after 1872. Interestingly, the religious groups of the Muslims found enumeration in the following censuses. The statistical survey of W.W.Hunter,<sup>32</sup> conducted in 1874 also contain some information on the Kabirpanth, although he primarily relied for the data on the first census.

Works of Abul Fazl and travelogue of Tavernier may be treated as the primary sources for the Kabirpanth during the 16-17<sup>th</sup> centuries.

## SECONDARY SOURCES

Anthropological and sociological works have helped me to deal with the sociological and symbolic order of the panth. Historical works of various regions has enabled me to locate the growth of Kabirpanth in the prevailing socio-religious condition of the respective regions from the sixteenth century onwards. Historical works on the political inclination of religious organizations in the modern period have been of great help in understanding the political involvement of the Kabirpanthis.

Some of the secondary sources directly relate to the history of Kabirpanth. The earliest reference to Kabirpanth occurs in the ethnographic work of H.H.Wilson<sup>33</sup>, written in the early nineteenth century. Considering Kabirpanth as a Hindu religious sect, Wilson commented on his social composition, organizational form, myths and rituals. He has based his account on some devotional texts, his personal interview and a few religious scriptures of the panth.

Some Indian scholars also provide us with some idea about Kabirpanth in the late nineteenth century. Among them Pramatha Nath Bose and J.N Bhattacharya are foremost. Pramatha Nath Bose,<sup>34</sup> in his history of the socio-religious groups active in late nineteenth century Bengal and United Province, noted that Kabirpanth had a sizeable following, mostly belonging to the low castes. He noticed that the Kabirpanthis were not Hindus as they had broken away from the parent religion, just as the Buddhist and the Sikhs had done before them. J.N Bhattacharya<sup>35</sup> also noted that the Kabirpanthis believed in monotheism which distinguished themselves from the other Hindus.

In the early 20<sup>th</sup> century, two exclusive monographs on Kabirpanth were written by G.H. Westcott and F.E. Keay. G.H. Westcott<sup>36</sup> was a Bishop and also a fellow of the Allahabad university. His Christian bias is reflected in his estimation of Kabirpanth. He has largely relied on his own observation to describe the history of two of the Kabir maths in north India. He also consulted Wilson's description of the panth. However, his account is largely based on his own ten years' study of the religious scriptures of the panth, supplemented by his personal observation of the Kabir-Chaura and the Dharmadasi branches respectively at Kashi in the then United Provinces and *Bandhogarh* in the Central Provinces. He concluded that the religious practices of Kabirpanth were 'influenced by Christianity'.<sup>37</sup> F. E. Keay's study,<sup>38</sup> originally written as a doctoral thesis submitted with the London University, is even more useful for us as he described the origin of Dhanauti and Bidupur maths, which have been two main headquarters of the Kabirpanth branches, yet not mentioned in details in previous English works. Parashuram Chaturvedi's study of the *sant* tradition in North India<sup>39</sup> deals with Kabirpanth in details. He relied mainly on the religious scriptures of the panth and the then unpublished research of Kedarnath Dvivedi on Kabirpanth. Dvivedi had been one of his students. We have a detail account of the premiere maths in Bihar in these two studies. Kedarnath Dvivedi<sup>40</sup> has conducted extensive field-work to delineate the spread of kabirpanth. In his work, oral tradition has given primacy over religious texts. The antiquity of a math is judged on the basis of the *Guru-pranali*.

In recent years, there has been an increasing trend to study Kabirpanth on the basis of oral data. Baidyanath Sarasvati's

paper<sup>41</sup> on the socio-religious aspects of the panth, Mohd.Sahabuddin's unpublished Ph.D. thesis on Kabirpanth<sup>42</sup> and R.L Khandelwal<sup>43</sup> study of the social composition of Kabirpanth in north India are some prominent examples. The books of David N.Lorenzen<sup>44</sup> on religious developments within Kabirpanth in north India deserve special mention. He has supplemented his field observations with available material in printed sources. He has also worked on the political involvement Sadhus and Mahants of some popular maths.

Apart from these works, two scholars have focused exclusively on the myths of the panth. David Scott<sup>45</sup> has collected some of these myths and has attempted to situate them in the socio-religious conditions prevailing at the time of Kabir. Uma Thukral's book<sup>46</sup> and articles on Kabirpanthi myths have also been valuable.

Kabir is an important figure in Sikh tradition. He is regarded by many as having been Nanak's spiritual mentor. When the fifth Sikh guru, Arjandev was compiling the Adi Granth, which he completed in 1604, he included verses attributed at that time to Kabir, and thus these have been preserved unchanged to what constitutes the oldest and most authentic tradition of Kabir's verses.

Many scholars estimate that roughly around the same time of the compilation of the Adi Granth, the *Bijak* also must have been compiled or composed. While describing different versions of the *Bijak*, F.E.Keay writes- " This is the probable account of the *Bijak*.The compiler may have been Bhagwan Das, and the compilation perhaps was not made till somewhere about 1600."

<sup>47</sup> The most striking feature of the *Bijak* is that while Kabir is claimed as its author, it shows little evidence that he would have

been primarily an exponent of bhakti and for this reason the author is more probably a Kabirpanthi. The centuries that followed must have seen a flourishing of the spurious Kabir literature much of which is still popular in the panth.

The scholars on Kabir initially used to prepare lists of works attributed to Kabir and in the 19<sup>th</sup> century several seemed to have been unable to push their acquaintance with Kabir any further than this. For example, the first historian of Hindi literature, Garcin de Tassy, between 1837 and 1847 composed his famous work <sup>48</sup> in which he devotes fourteen pages to Kabir. De Tassy seems to have relied largely on H.H. Wilson, who, in 1832, had published various Kabirpanthi works. <sup>49</sup> In 1883, Sivasingh in his *Saroj*, the first attempt in Hindi at a *History of Hindi literature*, and in 1888 Sir George Grierson, <sup>50</sup> in his *Modern Vernacular Literature of Hindustan*, both present lists of Kabir works and offer some brief information on their author. It would appear that in academic circles at the end of the 19<sup>th</sup> century, knowledge of Kabir and his works was very sketchy. Even his date seems shrouded in uncertainty and the most that Grierson would venture to say was that Kabir would have lived around 1400.

Probably owing to the wide diffusion of the Kabirpanth and the popularity of aphorisms and proverbs attributed to him, Kabir continued to attract the attention of the scholars. The first real critical study was that of G.H. Westcott, *Kabir and the Kabirpanth*. Published in 1907. <sup>51</sup> This study is based mainly on the *Bijak*, the *Granth Sahib* and the literature of the panth. Westcott was the first to take note of the problem of establishing the authenticity of texts and his comment in this regard is interesting: "At any rate we have no right to assume that the

teaching of Kabir was identical with that given at the present time by the Mahants of the Panth that bears his name.”<sup>52</sup>

A decade was to elapse before the next study appeared. In 1920 Ayodhya Singh Upadhyay ‘Hariaudh’, working under the guidance of Shyamsundar Das, published a text with some general information on Kabir’s thought.<sup>53</sup> Later on Shyamsundardas himself brought to light two remarkable manuscripts which he published in 1928.<sup>54</sup> One of these manuscripts carried the date 1504 and the other 1824. It was certainly an important finding. Shyamsundardas records his estimation in these words: “After looking over these two copies, it is evident to me that we took all the works now attributed to Kabir, we would find a good nine tenths of them in these two.”<sup>55</sup> One must allow for the enthusiasm A more sober look at the abundant variants amongst manuscripts and traditions which eventually came to light, led scholars to a more critical view of the material published by Shyamsundardas in 1928. However, his *Kabir Granthavli* remained the standard text for the next thirty years and is still regarded by some scholars as the most reliable. Shyamsundardas uncovered the real textual problem of Kabir studies but, apart from publishing manuscripts, he engaged in no notable textual criticism.

The non-Hindi world in the main came to know more of Kabir after Rabindranath Tagore in 1914 published a verse translation in English of a selection of readings compiled by a fellow Bengali scholar, Kshiti Mohan Sen.<sup>56</sup> The name of Tagore, coupled with a preface by the English religious writer, Evelyn Underhill, gave this small work considerable prestige, but to Dwyer, its unscholarly nature soon brought this work under criticism. For example the editor and translator of the *Bijak*,<sup>57</sup> Rev. Ahmad writes; “This



translation is supposed to be based on the Hindi text (in Bengali characters) with a Bengali translation by Mr. Kshiti Mohan Sen, who has gathered from many sources a large collection of poems and hymns to which the name of Kabir is attached.”<sup>58</sup> The Rev. Ahmad Shah actually himself made a careful examination of this translation and found that it was based not on the Hindi text, but upon the Bengali translation which is far from accurate. Kshiti Mohan Sen’s collection is in four volumes and contains 341 poems. The one hundred poems translated by Tagore are taken from the first three volumes, which contain only 264. Of these hundred, there are, according to Ahmad Shah, only five, which in a mutilated form, can be safely attributed to Kabir. And despite these critical doubts on authenticity, F.E. Keay’s work was published three years after Shyamsundardas’ *Kabir-Granthavali* without noticing apparently his knowledge of its existence. This, to Charlotte Vaudeville, exemplifies a kind of divorce between the old school of British scholars-cum-missionaries and the new ‘native’ scholarship.’<sup>59</sup>

Among the notable Kabir scholars of the period Hazari Prasad Dvivedi, one of the towering personality of Hindi literature, is worth consideration. In 1942 he published *Kabir*, a critical study of various aspects of Kabir’s thought, with revised and enlarged editions coming later. As F.E. Keay before him, he made some attempt to disengage Kabir’s thought from the mass of Kabirpanthi teachings which had overgrown it, but his work suffered from the serious defect of overlooking the importance of authenticity of texts. Hazari Prasad Dvivedi seems to have relied almost entirely on the compilations of poems made by Kshiti Mohan Sen, and this disregard for textual scholarship is still found in the 1971 edition of his book. However, some of Hazari

Prasad Dvivedi's insights into Kabir's life and thought are of great value.

One feature of the development of interest in Kabir has been the extraordinary popularity of the *Bijak* which has gone through thirty-two editions in the last hundred years and continues to appear in popular editions.<sup>60</sup> In recent years late Shukdev Singh has prepared what is the first critical edition of *Bijak*.<sup>61</sup> Renowned scholars like Charlotte Vaudeville are of the opinion that the importance of the *Bijak* should not be overlooked and that it may, in the long run, prove to be closer to the original Kabir than and other text.<sup>62</sup>

Among other Kabir texts commonly accepted in academic circles is the Kabir section of the *Guru Granth Sahib*, published by Ramkumar Varma. He also published a study of Kabir mysticism entitled *Kabir Ka Rahasyavad*.<sup>63</sup> This is one of many valuable studies done on Kabir's thought and allied subjects of which the forerunner was Barthwal's *Nirguna School of Hindi Poetry*.<sup>64</sup> During 1940s and 50s, some followed study of the background of Kabir's religions, but textual criticism remained the neglected child in Indian academic circles.

The most important event in modern studies on Kabir undoubtedly the publication by Parasnath Tiwari of Allahabad University of his textual work on Kabir to which he gave the title of *Kabir Granthavali* in 1961. He applied the criteria of the science of textual criticism to all the available manuscripts and printed texts, purporting to have Kabir as their author. He eventually arrived at a sizeable body of verse which he claims to be the closest could come in the then present state of research into Kabir's original verses. However, even this achievement has not met with unquestioning approval from all scholars. For

example, Sarnamsingh Sharma,<sup>65</sup> has offered a very stringent criticism of Tiwari's work, less scholarly and Charlotte Vaudeville, too, while admitting the value of Tiwari's work and basing her own English version of Kabir largely on it, had pointed out flaws in it.<sup>66</sup> For all this, it has to be admitted that Tiwari's *Kabir Granthavali* was the only attempt at claiming Kabir's authorship, and hence it took precedence as Kabir's thought.

The above fragmentary sketch studies of Kabir over a long period, I present in order to give some idea of the ups and downs of interest pertaining to his thought. It does not give a full picture of the development of interest in Kabir or of his discovery process in Europe or his rediscovery in India. Some interesting figures in this process have been omitted mainly because their work had no lasting effect. Mention could, however, be made of the Italian Capuchin missionary, *Padre* Marco della Tomba, who spent nearly twenty years in or around the town of Bettiah in northern Bihar in the middle of the eighteenth century. He recollected his contacts with a sect he called Cabiristi,<sup>67</sup> presumably some branch of the Kabirpanth, and actually translated that Kabir was the preceptor of Alexander the Great. It was possibly the difficulty of distilling history out of such fantasies that drove the English scholar, Wilson, to doubt whether Kabir ever existed.<sup>68</sup>

Most of these works have relied on oral evidence, primarily due to the absence of written records related to the panth. Lack of written documents has perhaps dissuaded scholars from studying Kabirpanth in the historical perspective. At best, some of these studies have attempted to present its history on basis of the traditional belief about the formation of its main branches. There is no attempt on their part to describe the spread of the

sub-branches of a particular region in a chronological sequence. There is neither much discussion of the organizational form nor the manner of functioning of the panth in the existing historiography.

However these works offer an overview on the early history of Kabirpanth as preserved in popular memory. These make it clear that Kabirpanth has drawn its following predominantly from the intermediate and lower castes wherever it has spread its influence. They also mention that there exists considerable similarity in the myths, rituals, organizational network, the status of the Mahant, and even the pattern of internal feuds in Kabirpanth all over north India have emerged quite clear in these studies.

Conducting the project, we have been able to gather field data from at least 19 provinces of India in which Kabirpanth has moderate to widespread existence; namely, Andhra Pradesh, Assam, Bihar, Chhattisgarh, Gujarat, Haryana, Himachal Pradesh, Jammu & Kashmir, Karnataka, Madhya Pradesh, Meghalaya, Maharashtra, Odissa, Punjab, *Rajasthan*, Sikkim, Uttar Pradesh, Uttarakhand, West Bengal. Field-works in all these provinces<sup>69</sup> have added to the existing knowledge about various aspects of the Kabirpanth history; viz origin, pattern and process of its expansion as well as specific elements of regional and national character as enshrined in the panth. For instance, we have come to know for the first time that Kabirpanth has sizeable presence in the present provinces of Haryana, Himachal Pradesh, Punjab and Jammu region of Jammu and Kashmir, the main constituents of northern states of India. Our study demonstrates that the Kabirpanth, in some form or the other has continued to exist in some of these regions, at least since turn of the sixteenth

century. Our findings also tend to suggest that the present Sikh religion probably had close relationship with the tradition of Kabir during their early stage.

Apart from field studies, we also visited some national and state libraries, archives and *waqf* boards of Shia and Sunni Muslims.<sup>71</sup> Among the libraries that we consulted, most important have been the National Library, Kolkata, NMML, New Delhi, and Joshi Library, Punjab University, Chandigarh, A. N Sinha Institute Library, Patna among some others.<sup>72</sup>

Visit to these libraries has familiarized me with a number of primary and secondary sources pertaining to the Kabirpanth. Primary sources on the condition of the Kabirpanth during the colonial period available in the libraries have been the ethnographic works of scholars and census reports of the 19-and-20<sup>th</sup> centuries.

Among the archives, we could check just two of these - West Bengal State Archives, College Avenue, Calcutta and National Archives, New Delhi.<sup>73</sup> But we could not find a valuable material relating to the Kabirpanth in the archives except a few travel-related documents of the migrating disciples of Kabir during early 20<sup>th</sup> century.

Yet my visit to the *Sunni Waqf* Board office, Lucknow, Uttar Pradesh has been of immense value. The chairperson as well as the sub-ordinate officials of the Board had been kind enough to share with me some revenue documents relating to the Kabir Mazar of Magahar, district Sant kabir Nagar, Uttar Pradesh.

Based on these findings, I have chapterized the history of the Kabirpanth in accordance with its gradual unfolding in time and space in India a pattern which I had not initially proposed in the original research format. Even as scholars on Kabirpanth were

aware of its presence in parts of several states, but our field works add to our further understanding of their probable origin and expansion in the each of these present states. In almost all these states, we had to conduct more than one round of field trips to get required information about the history of the panth. The findings of the project have enabled me to present these at national and international fora. A few of these papers are already accepted for publication and soon to be published. I had presented a paper on the history of the Kabirpanth in Punjab region in the 2013 session of the Indian History Congress, which is already accepted by a research journal for publication. Another paper on the diasporas of the Kabirpanth globally was presented in an international conference organized at Mansfield college, Oxford University, Oxford, UK, in between 6-7 April 2014.<sup>70</sup> The paper is also accepted for publication by an international journal of history.

My work attempts to trace the history of the Kabirpanth at the national level. I have tried to describe its growth in a chronological sequence as indicated in the available sources. Despite the paucity of written evidence, I have tried to understand the evolution of a religious order in historical perspective.

Religious sects have been one of the most neglected themes in religious studies in India. My emphasis throughout the work has been on these aspects of Kabirpanth. There have been some of the gaps in the existing historiography on the panth that I have attempted to fill up. Ultimately, it is the construction of the community identity of the Kabirpanth that has been at the centre of my study, even though I have never specifically raised the question of identity formation. Thus, my entire efforts to

reconstruct its history have finally turn out to be the history of institutional growth of the Kabirpanth in India and abroad.

## Footnotes

1. David. N Lorenzen had estimated Kabirpanth's numerical strength to have been 30 lakhs during the 1990s. For details, see David N., 'The Kabir-Panth and Social Protest, in Karine Schomer and McLeod(eds.), *The Sants, Studies in a Devotional Tradition of India*, Motilal Banarasidas, Delhi 1987, pp.182-30. My own estimate is just based on the popular estimate as well as on the rate of decennial growth of the population in India.
2. The first instance of migration of the Kabir followers beyond the boundary of the south Asia seems to have occurred in the trail of the indenture system as introduced by the British government in India during 1830s. I treat this subject in a separate chapter of my fourth coming book.
3. These are the terms most commonly used by the lay followers of the Kabirpanth in the rural parts; whereas resourceful centres began to be named as maths adopting the terminology as developed for the *sagun* Hindu devotional centres all over India.
4. *Mul Shakha* also called *Acharya Gaddi* (original/head branch/ seat of head Mahant) generally denotes both the oldness and prominent position of these centres for their respective branches. *Acharya Gaddis* and *Mul Shakhas* are interchangably used for the same branches.



5. In the main, Kabir-Chaura math, Dhanauli math, Bidupur math, Damakheda math, Kharasiya math, Garibdasi math at Chhudani, Allahabad math founded by Abhilash Das have been famous as Acharya *Gaddis* for the associated maths, apart from Burhanpur math, Madhya Pradesh, which has also taken on the character of an independent branch.
6. Irfan Habib, 'The Historical Background of the Popular Monotheistic Movements of the 15<sup>th</sup>-17<sup>th</sup> Centuries' in Bindeshwar Prasad,(ed.), *Ideas in History*, Asia Publishing House, Bombay,1969, pp.6-13, Satish Chandra, *State, Society and Culture in Medieval India*, OUP, New Delhi, 2012
7. Devotional cults had been of different types during this period. For details, see, Sharma, Krishna, *Bhakti and the Bhakti Movement, A New Perspective*, Munnishiram Manoharlal, New Delhi,1987; Benoy Kumar Sarkar, *The Folk Element in Hindu Culture, A Contribution to Socio-Religious Studies in Hindu Folk Institutions*, Oriental Books Corporation, Delhi 1972 (1917).
8. I have based my statements about the devotional cults on the description of Radha Krishna Chaudhary, *Mithila in the age of Vidyapati (C.1330-1525 A.D.): A Study in Cultural History*, Chaukhambha Orientalia, Varanasi, 1976, pp.77-78; also see, W.G. Briggs, *Gorakhnath and Kanphatta Yogis*, Calcutta, 1938; Shashibhushan Dasgupta, *Obscure Religious Sects*, Calcutta, 1969,

9. Close connection between the rise of the bhakti movements and the sufi movements in the medieval India has been highlighted in most of the scholarly works on the subject. For details, one can see, R.G. Bhandarkar, *Vaishnavism, Shaivism and Minor Religious Systems*, Indological Book House, Varansi, 1965 (1913); P.D. Barthwal, *The Nirgun School of Hindi Poetry. An Exposition of Medieval Indian Sants Mysticism*, Indian Book Shop, Benares, 1936.
10. Charlotte Vaudeville, *A Weaver Named Kabir*, OUP, Delhi 1993, p. 17
11. Purnendu Ranjan, *History of Kabirpanth, a Regional Process*, Anamika Publishers, New Delhi, 2008, pp. 127-184; also see Uma Thukral, 'The Avatar Doctrine in the Kabirpanth', in David N. Lorenzen (ed.), *Religion in North India, Community Identity and Political Action*, State University of New York Press, Albany, 1995, pp. 221-229; and also my paper, in the *Proceedings of the Indian History Congress*, vol.II, Delhi, 2009, pp. 442-457. I had an occasion to present a research paper titled, 'Myth and Ritual in the Kabirpanth', 'In an international conference organised by the World History Congress, at Salem, Massachusetts, USA, June, 2009.
12. My statement is based on the studies of Radha Krishna Chaudhary, op.cit., 1976, p.67; Satish Chandra, *Historiography, Religion and State in Medieval India*, Har Anand Publications, New Delhi, 1996.

13. Almost all these *rajs* had some connections with Kabirpanth as described in the next chapters.
14. The presence of *Darvishes* is highlighted in the scholarly works of, A. H. Askari, 'A Fifteenth Century Shuttari Sufi Saint of North Bihar', *JBRS*, Vol. XXXVII, Bihar Research Society, Patna, March-June 1951, pp. 66-82; S.A. A. Rizvi, *A History of Sufism in India*, Vol.I, Munshiram Manoharlal, Delhi, 1978; R.G. Bhandarkar, *Vaishnavism, Shaivism and Minor Religious Systems*, Indological Book House, Varansi, 1965 (1913); J.N. Bhattacharaya, *Hindu Castes and Sect: An Exposition of the Origin of the Hindu Caste System and the Bearing of the Sects Towards Each Other and Towards Other Religious Systems*, Editions Indian, Calcutta, 1968 (1886).
15. R.K. Chaudahary, op. cit., p.25.
16. I have personally visited most of these places during my Ph.D. as these belong to Mithila which was the geographical region of my research topic. There have been many such places in other parts of India, I, however, know these places more than many others to which I could not visit personally.
17. A.H. Askari, op.cit., p.79.
18. William R. Pinch, *Peasants and Monks in British India*, University of California Press, Berkeley, 1996, p.35
19. Ibid, p.36

20. Abul Fazl, *Ain-e-Akbari*, (translt. H.S. Jarrett, Vol.II, *Asiatic Society of Bengal*, Baptist Mission Press, Calcutta, 1891.
21. Jean Baptiste Tavernier, *Travels in India*, (trans. from French V. Bell), Vol.II, Macmillan & Co, New York, 1889 (1676).
22. I have treated *samadhis* as an unconventional source in the history of Kabirpanth maths for my doctoral thesis on *Kabirpanth in Mithila*, CHS/SSS, JNU, 1998.
23. The Acharya Mahants Ram Dayal Das of Bidupur, Mahant Ramrup Goswami of Chatiya-Barharawa and Mahant of Dangaraha math, have got some of these translated for their own purposes.
24. Most of the Hindi scholars on the Kabirpanth; such as Kedarnath Dvivedi, Parashuram Chaturvedi, Abhilash Das, have used the *guru-pranalis* as a reliable source to measure the time of maths.
25. *Guru-pranalis* of maths at Chatiya-Barharwa, Dhanauti, Bidupur, Kabir-Chaura, Benares, Damakhera, Kharasiya, Jamnagar, Burhanpur, Lal Dawaza Surat, maths in Sikkim, and Gorubathan, Darjeeling, West Bengal. See Annexures 1-11.
26. I have checked almost all the published and lithographed *guru-pranalis* we have discovered during the field work for the project.

27. Acharya *Gaddis* at Damakhera, Dhanauti, and Burhanpur have somewhat detailed record of the associated sub-branches.
28. Francis Buchanan Hamilton, *History, Antiquities, Topography and Statistics of Eastern India*, (ed. by M. Martin), Vol. IV, Cosmos Publication, Delhi, 1976 (1838).
29. Ibid, p.304
30. *Census of British India, Report on the Census of Bengal*, Vol.I, 1872, Microfiche, Central Libraray, JNU, New Delhi, p.152
31. Ibid, p.11
32. W.W. Hunter, *Statistical Account of Bengal*, Tirhut & Champaran, vols. XIII and XXV, Concept Publication Delhi, 1976 (1877).
33. H.H.Wilson, *Religious Sects of the Hindus* (ed by Ernst R.Rost), Indological Book House, Varanasi, 1972 (1862).
34. Pramatha Nath Bose, *A History of Hindu Civilisation During British Rule; Social-Religious Condition, Social Condition, Industrial Condition*, Asian Publication Services, New Delhi, 1975(1894).
35. J.N. Bhattacharya, *Hindu Castes and Sect : An Exposition of the Origin of the Hindu Caste System and the Bearing of the Sects Towards Each Other and Towards Other Religious Systems*, Editions Indian, Calcutta, 1968 ( 1886), pp.216-218.

36. G. H. Westcott, *Kabir and the Kabirpanth*, Sushil Gupta, Calcutta, 1907.
37. Ibid, p.VII.
38. F.E. Keay, *Kabir and his Followers*, Association Press, Calcutta, 1931.
39. Parashuram Chaturvedi, *Uttari Bharat Ki Sant Paramapara*, (Hindi), Bharati Bhandar, Allahabad, 1972 (1959).
40. Kedarnath Divedi, *Kabir Aur Kabirpanth*, (Hindi), Sahitya Sammelan, Allahabad, 1965.
41. Baidyanath Sarasvati, 'Notes on Kabir: A non-literate Intellectul', In S. C. Malik (ed.), *Dissent, Preotest and Reform in Indian Civilization*, IIAS, Simla, 1977, pp.167-187
42. Shahabuddin, *History of Kabirpanth*, unpublished Thesis, Department of History, Aligarh Muslim University, 1975.
43. R.L.Khandelwal, 'Kabirpanth and its Social Contents', in S.P.Sen (ed.), *Social Contents of Indian Religious Reform Movements in the Nineteenth Twentieth Centuries*, Institute of Historical Studies, Calcutta,1978, pp.,75-83.
44. David N. Lorenzen, 'The Kabirpanth: Heretics to Hindus' in Lorenzen (ed.), *Religious Change and Cultural Domination*, El Colegio de Maxico, Maxico, 1981,pp. Lorenzen, David N., 'The Kabir Panth and Politics', *Political Science Review*, 20:3, Jaipur 1982, pp. 263-282.

45. David C Scott, *Kabir's Mythology, The Religious Perceptions, Doctrines and Practices of a Medieval Indian Sant*, Bhartiya Vidya Prakshan, Delhi, 1985.
46. Uma Thukral, op.cit., pp. 221-229.
47. F.E.Keay, op.cit., p.56.
48. Garcin de Tassy, *Historia de la literature hindouie et hindoustanie*, Vol. II, Paris, 1880, cited in William J. Dwyer, *Bhakti in Kabir*, Associated Book Agency, Patna, 1981, p.3.
49. ibid, p.3.
50. George Grierson, *Linguistic Survey of India*, Vol.I, Pt.I, Motilal Banarasidas, Delhi, 1967.
51. G.H.Westcott, op.cit.
52. Ibid, p. II.
53. Ayodhya Singh Upadhyay, *Kabir Vachanavali*, Allahabad, 1920
54. Shyamsundar Das, (Ed.), *Kabir Granthavali*, (Hindi), Nagari Pracharni Sabha, Varanasi, 1959 (1930).
55. Ibid,p.1.
56. Kshiti Mohan Sen, *Medieval Mysticism in India*, reprint, Oriental Book, New Delhi, 1974 (1936)
57. Ahmad Shah, *The Bijak of Kabir*, Hamirpur, 1917,p.17
58. Charlotte Vaudeville, op.cit., p. 135

59. William J. Dwyer, *Bhakti in Kabir*, Associated Book Agency, Patna, 1981, p.19
60. Shukdev Singh, *Kabir Bijak*, Hindi, Allahabad, 1972
61. Charlotte Vaudeville, *op.cit.*, p. 127
62. Ramkumar Varma, *Kabir Ka Rahasyavad*, Allahabad, 1969
63. P.D. Barthwal, *op.cit.* p. 197
64. Parasnath Tiwari, *Kabir Granthawali*, (Hindi), Allahabad Vishawvidyalya, Allahabad, 1961.
65. Sarnamsingh Sharma, *Kabir: Yyaktiv, Krititv evam Siddhant*, (Hindi), Bhartiya Shodh Sansthan, Rajasthan, Jaipur, 1969, pp. 124-128.
66. Charlotte Vaudeville, *op.cit.*, p. 129
67. Marco della Tomba, *The Scourge of the Mission, Marco della Tomba in Hindustan*, (trans. and ed. by David N Lorenzen), Yoda Press, 2010, p. 87
68. William J. Dwyer, *op. cit*, p. 7.
69. *Ibid*, p.7
70. Field works in all these provinces were conducted largely by my Project Fellows (PF), who worked for my project for a year alone, as sanctioned by the UGC, New Delhi, from 16 April 2013 to 31 March 2014; I myself therefore had to carry forward these tasks alone for larger period of the project.



71. I had presented my research paper in an international conference on Diaspora, organized at Mansfield College, Oxford University, Oxford, UK, April 2015.
72. I had visited Sunni Waqf Board Lucknow, on 15 March 2015
73. I visited National Archives, Janpath, New Delhi, 16-17 May, 2013. I consulted National Library of Kolkata on 3 Oct 2014, and West Bengal State Archives, Kolkata, 4 Oct., 2014.

## Kabirpanth during the Sixteenth Century

The religious community known as 'Kabirpanth', formed after the name of Kabir, seems to be striking its organizational roots in the years following Kabir's *Samadhi* (death), but it was probably not well known by this name till his death. All the available textual evidences and oral tradition indicate that despite Kabir's widespread popularity both in royal and popular circles and scribes of the time, do not refer to this word Kabirpanth (the path of Kabir) in their texts. Yet we have evidences to believe that certain places where Kabir himself had either visited or were invited as a *jinda pir* or a living guru, most of these places, saw the emergence of centres of devotion, involving active support of Kabir followers in all possible manners- financially, physically and religiously. These centres gradually grew into the congregational points and came to form a group of distinct religious *panth* called Kabirpanth in coming centuries. Kabir is said to have died in early sixteenth century. There seems to be consensus both among academic scholars and the sectarian believers at least on the year of Kabir's death at Magahar in 1518, if not on year of his birth. In this chapter, I first describe the centres of devotion which are said to have been in existence since the life-time of Kabir himself

and are presently known as the oldest centres of the Kabirpanth in India.

Magahar, the place where Kabir breathed his last, presently located in the district of Sant Kabir Nagar<sup>1</sup>, Uttar Pradesh, has been famous for housing two religious structures- a Kabir Mazar and a Kabir *Samadhi* within a single complex, just separated by a low-lying wall in between within an expanded area of 100 metres from each other. The Kabir Mazar (tomb) and the *Samadhi* presumably represent to the historians one of the few archaeological sites wherein the same person is adored structurally in two different religious forms-Hindu and Islam. The *Mazar* is said to have been maintained by the Muslim care-takers (*Sevaks*), who have been inhabitants of the village Karmua Kabirpur, just 1 km. from the site of the Kabir Mazar, for the last 500 years.

The Kabir Mazar is said to be erected by Bijali Khan (Pathan) in 1518, who according to the present generation of his family, was an eminent disciple of Kabir. According to them, Kabir was originally a native of Magahar and had shifted to Kashi for the dissemination of his knowledge akin to a *sufi*.<sup>2</sup> To them, it was Bijali Khan who had led the group, and in fact, successfully arranged engravement of Kabir's dead body at the site where his tomb exists. The legend of Kabir's transforming into two pieces of flowers was said to be fabricated by Bijali Khan and his supporters just to quieten the agitated minds of than radical Hindu followers of Kabir. The Hindu followers agreed only when they found one piece of the flower engraved inside the grave, and the other piece of flower was shared with the Hindu followers who thereafter carried the 'flower' to Kabir Chaura, in Kashi where it was once again enshrined as Kabir's grave

(*Samadhi*), primarily by the Hindu disciples of Kabir under the leadership of Veer (Bir) Singh Vaghela (Baghela).

The Kabir Mazar thus built later reported to be renovated by Fidae Khan in 1612 (V.S) as the Banares Gazetter reports.<sup>3</sup> The erection of both these memorials is traced back to the event of Kabir's death itself by Kabirpanthis. It is a commonly accepted fact that followers of Kabir, during his life-time, included both Hindus and Muslims, two main religious groups of the time. Upon the death of a grand soul, who himself had declared the futility of the extraneous rituals through his unique *sakhis*, then followers of the surrounding regions could not find a better solution than erecting two separate memorials of Kabir-one *Mazar* in an Islamic way, the other *samadhi* following the line of the Hindu bhakti tradition. It is said that the Muslim followers of the region were then led by Bijali Khan, while the Hindu followings were led by Veer Singh Baghela, then *raja* of Bandhogarh.

However traditional belief about the origin of twin centres of graves in the same complex does not find favour in the light of existing evidences with us. Whatever evidence is available presently hints at the *samadhis'* formation in the eighteenth century, about 200 years later than Kabir Mazar. We have at least three textual evidences which lead us to believe the later installation of *Samadhi* at the present site of the complex of the Kabir Mazar. The earliest reliable reference of the *Mazar* comes from Abul Fazl who has since been quoted by many scholars on Kabir. *Ain-e-Akbari*, the classic chronicle of the sixteenth century written within 75 years of Kabir's death, has more than one references of Kabir and his admirers. Abul Fazl mentions the

existence of a Kabir tomb but at Ratanpur of that time. To quote him,

Some say that at Rattanpur is the tomb of Kabir, asserter of the unity of God. The portals of the spiritual discernment were partly opened to him and he discarded the effete doctrines of his time. Numerous verses in the Hindi language are still extant of him containing important theological truth.<sup>4</sup>

In the section on describing Oudh subah, Abul Fazl further wrote that

Some affirm that Kabir *Muahhid* reposes here and many authentic traditions are related regarding his sayings and doings to this day. He was revered by both Hindu and Muhammadan for his catholicity of doctrines and the illumination of his mind and when he died, the *Brahmans* wished to burn his body and the Muhammadans to bury it.<sup>5</sup>

Abul Fazl's description of the Kabir Mazar drew first the attention of Francis Buchanan while he was writing his ethnographic accounts of the eastern part of the British India during the early years of the nineteenth century. Francis Buchanan too makes interesting comment on Abul Fazl's note on Kabir tomb as quoted above:

Abul Fazl mentions this tomb as being situated at Ruttenpoor (Ratnapoor), and that Kavir lived

in the *time* of Sultan Secunder Lowdi (Gladwin's translation, vol.2, page 41). This would make him much later than the account of the keeper states; as Sekundur Lodi governed from 1488 to 1516; but it is likely, that Abul Fazl may have been mistaken in the date, as well as the place, for no tomb of Kavir(sic) was ever known at Ratnapoor (sic), now usually called Bangsi; while the official or Muhhamedan name of Magahar is Husunpoor. The Muhammedan governors have, however, always shown a good deal of respect for Kavir, and the present buildings round his grave are said to have been erected about 200 years ago, by a Nawab Fedi Khan, who was superintendent of the district (Chuklahdar) of Gorukhpoor (sic).<sup>6</sup>

The mention of the Kabir Mazar at Ratanpur, to me, has been a definitive evidence of the initiation of the Kabir's *panth* since the sixteenth century. Seen in the present knowledge about the Kabirpanth, the mention of Ratanpur as having a tomb of Kabir may not be corroborative evidence for the Magahar tomb, but of the fact that Kabir's followers had opened there a famous centre of devotion in Kabir's name. Sectarian texts and prevailing tradition of the Dharamdasi branch lead us to believe that following the political chaos arising in the Bandhogarh kingdom by successors of Sikandar Lodi and the faternal feuds erupting in between two successor sons of Dharamdas during the latter half

of the sixteenth century, the younger son of Dharamdas, Churamani *alias* Muktamani had shifted his religious centre from Bandhogarh to Ratanpur, which had been a capital town in the Kalachuri kingdom of the period. Abul Fazl had begun to write his chronicle around the same period and had completed his monumental work, *Ain-e-Akbari* in 1595. The erection and preservation of a tomb, too betrays the signs of *panth* which was already in making as, could not have been possible without the active involvement and support of a substantial number of admirers, followers, and supporters of Kabir, traditionally associated with Muslims.

Another evidence of the emerging Kabirpanth comes from the early sixteenth century text of Abdul Haq in his *Akhbar-ul-Akhyar*, a Persian text,<sup>7</sup> Abdul recalls Kabir as having been a topic of conversation between his father and grand father as early as in 1522 (19 feb). Abdul Haq's reference of Kabir's religious image as mentioned in his *Persian* work was first noted by Mohan Singh in 1943 and recently also described by Irfan Habib, can be summarized thus :

My ancestor Agha Muhammed Turk Bukhari came to Delhi in the time of Ala-ud-din Khalji. His son was Malik Muiz-ud-din; Malik Musa was the son of Muiz-ud-din who lived in the time of Firoz Shah. One of Malik Musa's sons was Shaikh Firoz, who was alive in the first part of the reign of Sultan Bahlol and died in 1455 (A. H. 860). His posthumous son was Sa'dullah who was my real grandfather. Shaikh Rizq Ullah was Sa'dullah's eldest son. My uncle Rizq used

to say that one day I asked Sa'dullah: this famous Kabir whose (*Bishanpadas*) men read, was he a *Musalman* or a *Kafir*? He replied: he was a *Muvahhid*, believer in one God. I then submitted: but a Muvaihhdid is a *ghair Kafir*, non-Kafir, in other words, a *Musalman*. Thereupon, he said it is too difficult to comprehend this meaning or explanation. You should try to understand. Sa'dullah died in 1521 (A. H. 928). My father at the time was 8 years old. Shaikh Rizq Ullah was born in 1491 and died in 1581. My grandfather Shaikh Sa'dullah was a *Murid* or disciple of Shaikh Mohd Malava, whose tomb is at Malawa town in Qanauj. My uncle Rizq Ullah was also made a disciple of Shaikh Muhammad, when Shaikh Muhammad Malava visited these parts (Delhi) during the reign of Sultan Sikandar; my grandfather associated with him for several years.<sup>8</sup>

By the time Abul Fazl, the court chronicler of Akbar, completed his *Ain-e- Akbari*, Kabir had begun to be recognized in the sixteenth century, not as a Muslim or Hindu, but eminently as a 'monotheist' (*muwahhid*). This is the purport of a conversation which Abdul Haqq reported as having taken place between his grandfather and father as early as 1522.<sup>9</sup>

Oral tradition avers that at the time Kabir breathed his last at Magahar, the most prominent among those who were present



were Bhagodas, Jagodas, Surati Gopal, Veer Singh Vaghela, Dharamdass and Bijali Khan among many others. These immediate followers besides having been perpetual companions of Kabir, in fact, belonged to the different geographical areas of the medieval India. Bhagodas hailed from present Uttarakhand, Jagodas from Orissa, Surat Gopal from South India, Veer Singh Vaghela and Dharamdass from the Bandhogarh *raj* of the present Madhya Pradesh and Bijali Khan from Magahar itself. We may treat them as the leading members of five respective regions, which must have sizeable followings of Kabir in their respective regions.

We have discovered a definitive textual evidence regarding the initial period of formation of a *panth* in Kabir's name during Akbar's reign as well. The valuable document comes from the possession of a math situated presently at Satmalpur, a village in north Bihar. It is a 3 paged *sanad* still preserved at the Satmalpur math.<sup>10</sup> The *sanad*, in fact was issued under the seal of the *Mughal Sultan*, Ahmad Shah (1748-1754), the successor son of Muhammad Shah 'Rangeela'. It certifies that *Lal sahib*,<sup>11</sup> a *faqir-e- Kabir*, was donated 150 *bighas* of land near village Noorpur situated in the *Kasama pargana*. The certificate was issued by Ghulam, who was probably an official of land revenue at the paragana level in *hijari* 1020. This year pertains to the reign of Akbar the Great. The *sanad* also indirectly indicates at expanding trend of the *panth* then being formed in the name of Kabir. It seems to have by then acquired a distinct identity at least in the royal circle, as the Mughal authority categorized him as a *faqir-e-Kabir*, implying thereby a line of *sadhus* then being identified with the tradition of Kabir.

Nabhaji, another near contemporary religious writer, also notes in his '*Bhaktmal*' of c1600:

Kabir refused to recognize caste rules (*Varnasram*) and the six (Brahmanical) schools. He held that without devotion (*bhakti*) religion would be irreligion (*adharm*). Asceticism (*jog*), fasting and charity are useless without adoration (*bhajan*). By means of *ramainis*, *shabdis* and *sakhis*, he preached to both Hindus and Muslims (*Turaks*). He showed no partiality to anyone, but spoke for the benefit of all. He spoke boldly and tried to say what would please the world. Kabir's verses had become a household name in parts of Mughal India.<sup>12</sup>

Oral tradition, however, takes us back to the Kabir's life-time telling us about his spiritual tours to several parts of medieaval India, from Afganistan to Kuchh, and from Orissa to Bihar. In fact the accounts of Abul Fazl, and Nabhadas testify to the fact of the affect Kabir's *vanis* had left over the general public then echoed in the Mughal imperial court and in the uniting of then near contemporary writers. Oral tradition prevailing among the Kabirpanth followers to whom we interviewed, pinpoint a number of places where Kabir himself had visited, which in turn gradually developed as major centers of the Kabirpanth.

Among the earliest places where Kabir had stayed for the reasonable span of time are: Benaras, Bandhogarh, Jagannathpuri, Fatuha, Chatiya and Dwarka, Kabir Vad and lastly

in Magahar.<sup>14</sup> Although we do not have hard evidence to exactly know how much resources these centers of Kabir's visit had acquired in terms of followings and material accumulation, but oral tradition and later evidence suggest that these must have had substantial resources, otherwise Kabir's *vanis* would not have spread so swiftly in all directions within such a short-time as being recorded by Abul Fazl within 70 years of Kabir's death, as well as by Nabhadas and finally being included in the *Adi Granth* of the Sikhs compiled in 1604.

Thus, Abul fazl's account, as mentioned above, attest the fact that Kabir's preachings had begun to be heard in royal circles, he himself noted that a large number of Kabir's verses and legends had already occupied the attention of the people in general even before 1595. Nabhadas' accounts of Kabir, too, substantiate the spreading of the teachings of Kabir. His *vanis* had become so popular in the Punjab region, by the turn of the sixteenth century, that these occupied longest part of the *Adi Granth* as compiled by Guru Arjandev in 1604. Around the same time, his teachings had begun to attract the common men in the Central and Western India, as had been noted by some contemporary writers of Gujrat. Padmnabh and Kamal are believed to be those contemporaries from the region who have noted Kabir's influence in the part of India.<sup>15</sup>

All these contemporary followers of Kabir not only spread Kabir's teachings in their respective areas, but had founded centers of devotion later becoming popular as the Kabirpanth's math, *sthan*, *jagan*, *asthan* and *fanri*, or also as *gurudwara*, particularly in the Punjab.

Of course it is not possible to know which was the earliest center formed in the name of Kabir, yet it is for sure that Kabir had, for

major part of his life, lived in Benaras at a place where presently the Kabir-Chaura math is located. To my great dismay, however, the Mahants of the Kabir-Chaura, have nothing in their possession to show us as a testimony of Kabir's time or to support the the oral history of the Kabir-Chaura, Kashi. Based on oral tradition, the ousted Mahant Pt.Gangasharan Shashtri of Kabir-Chaura,<sup>16</sup> writes that Kabir himself lived in a hut at the present site of the Kabir-Chaura, which was, after Kabir's death in 1518 (1575v.s) developed as a Kabir-*samadhi* by Surati Gopal, the first Mahant of the Kabir-Chaura. In these acts of building *Samadhi*, Maharaja Veer Singh Dev is said to have made huge material support. Apart from the *Samadhi* of Kabir, it also contains the preserved wooden *paduka* (slipper) and a wooden pot said to be used by Kabir himself, and an old-age photo of Kabir. The Kabir-Chaura management has taken special care to demonstrate *Samadhi* as the memorial of Kabir's time by adding the *trishul* of Gorkhnath and a rosari of Ramanand inside it.

The original name of Srutigopal (also called Suratgopal), the first head of the Kabir Chaura, was Servanand. He was a learned Brahmin *pandit* from south India. He went about India debating with rival *pandits* and defeated every one of them. He then told his mother that she should call him '*Sarvajit*' since he had 'Conquered all'. His mother told him he must first debate with Kabir if he wanted to be known as *Sarvajit* in actual sense of the term. Sarvanand came to Benares and challenged Kabir to a debate. The debate went on for a long time, but Kabir would not convince Sarvanand. In disgust, Kabir finally agreed to let Sarvanand write a 'certificate of victory' saying that Kabir had been defeated. When Sarvanand got home, however, he found that the certificate said that he himself had been defeated. He

returned to Benares two more times to get new certificates, but each time he got home, he found that the certificate had been magically changed in Kabir's favour. Sarvanand finally gave up all his bookish learning and became Kabir's disciple, taking the new name Srutigopal.<sup>17</sup> The *sadhus* of the Kabir-Chaura branch of the Kabirpanth believe that Kabir appointed Srutigopal to be the head of the Kabirpanth with his *gaddi* at the site of Kabir's hut in the Kabir-Chaura neighbourhood of Benares. Today there is still a large monastery at this site.

Kabir is said to have also stayed in Jagannathpuri for quite some time on the sea-shore. Before reaching there, he is said to have stayed in Fatuha too, where a dry and unused pond is still famous as the meeting-point of Kabir and Guru Nanak.<sup>18</sup> Both these places saw the growth of famous Kabir-maths. Tradition has it that Kabir during his sojourn to the Gujarat region instructed one of his disciple brothers of the locality to carry on the task of spreading his message from Fatuha.

In Jagannathpuri there developed another Kabir-chaura math which still exists. There are many anecdotes and legends associated with Kabir and the temple threatened by the expanding area of the sea. Most of the Kabirpanthis believe that all the saints who had lived there along with Kabir including Malukdas preferred to take *Samadhi* at Kabir Chaura, Jagannathpuri itself even after Kabir's death. For example, Dharamdas took his *Samadhi* there, and his wife Ameena too had *Samadhi* there. According to some scholars Malukadas, an eminent disciple of Kabir, too, took *Samadhi* there alone. Most of these *samadhis* are still intact including the *Ashakubarri* of Kabir inside a cave where some meditators still use to spend sometime for nurturing their meditation.<sup>19</sup>

During the sixteenth century itself, Orissa had seen the emergence of another strong center of Kabir under the guidance of one of his immediate followers famous as Jago or Jagodas. About Jagodas, there is near unanimity that he belonged to Orissa. According to Kedarnath Dvivedi, he was born in 1538 (v.s).<sup>20</sup> His parents were Jaganath and Kamleshwari. To Abhilash Das,<sup>21</sup> Jago's mother's name was Hanso Bae or Mata Haso. He came in contact with Kabir in Jagannathpuri itself, where Jago used to stay along with his parents, his father being a *pujari* of the Jagannath temple. Mesmerized by Kabir's personality and teachings, he is said to have joined the entourage of Kabir then onwards.

The *samadhis* of Dharamdas, Amina *mata*, Sitaramdas, Devki *mata*, Surat Gopal, Ratnabae in the middle of Kabir's *Samadhi* has been preserved on a stretched mound located on the southern side of the Kabir-Chaura math in Jagannathpuri. Kedarnath Dvivedi claimed that he had found a manuscript titled *Asha Sagar* which maintained that the math was built during the time of *raja* Indrdaman of Orissa.<sup>22</sup> It also included the event of Dharamdas' death in Jagannathpuri. The geneology of *gurus* related to the Kabir-chaura, as listed in the Oriyan manuscript had been too exhaustive to believe. It mentioned the list of 200 *gurus* associated with this math. Kedarnath has, in his book, pointed out the discrepancies in these names-some of the names were repeated more than once, a few names were repeated even five times; to add to our confusion, a few names were written in divided forms; such as *ghan* and *shyam*, *Vithal* and *Nath*-to quote a few among meaning more. Kedarnath rightly suggests that these two names may be of the same person.

It is said that local *raja* of Orissa having its capital in Cuttack gradually came under the influence of Jagodas. The *raja* of Cuttack is said to have bequeathed about 400 *bighas* of land in the vicinity of then emerging town of Cuttack.<sup>23</sup> The *raja* is said to have donated land to the *sadhu* as a token of respect, as the *sadhu* (whose name is presently not known to the locals) had provided him relief from an incurable disease.

Among the earliest places where Kabir's center of devotion developed presumably during his life-time is said to be village Chatiya in the present west Champaran district of Bihar. It is said that both Kabir and Bhagwan Das, the later formally a *Harvyasi* disciple before surrendering to Kabir, had been moving eastward towards Nepal along the bank of the Gandak river. Bhagwan Das was a native of Sulemabad in the Pithoragarh district of the present Uttarakhand. According to Shukdev Singh,<sup>24</sup> Kabir had been moving eastwards via the Ganga-Narayani confluence upto Chatiya situated on the bank of Gandak river. It is also said that it was Chatiya where actual enlightenment (*gyan*) had descended over Bhagwandas in close proximity of Kabir, his *sadguru*. Exhausted they decided to take some rest in the midst of jungle of *java* plants spread along Narayani river almost 50 Kms from Motihari, the headquarters of the east Champaran district. In a couple of days, a large number of neighbouring villagers began to visit the *sadhus* abode at Chatiya, the site where Kabir and Bhagwan Das were staying.

There is an interesting legend that is said to have inspired *raja* to allow Kabir and Bhagwan Das to acquire as much space as they can cover on foot, just in a day's time. It is said that the local *raja* of the region, had been increasingly realizing that his family members were not able to hunt successfully during the period,

in the dense jungle in which accidentally both Kabir and Bhagwan Das had been camping inside. He was, on query, informed by his counsellors about the camp both the guru-disciple had made, and their presence had turned out to be a point of attraction for the people of different strata in the locality. As the crux of their teaching veered around truth and non-violence, *raja's* counsellors smelt Kabir's presence and his teaching of non-violence as the potent factor that was foreclosing the possibility of hunting in the jungle.

The *raja* grew in astonishment and curiosity and left for meeting such grand souls of *sadhus*. On reaching there the local *raja* found the guru-disciple duo lost in *dhyān* (meditation) unruffled by the din and bustle of the royal paraphernalia that usually accompanied a *raja*. The *raja* waited for the completion of their meditation. As soon as they opened their eyes, the *Raja* prostrated before them and urged them to get hold of the area they could cover in a day. Shobha Kant Jha, Shukdev Singh, and Vasudev Singh<sup>25</sup> - all these Hindi scholars have found this *dan-patra* and hence used it in their works to corroborate the oldness of the Bhagathi branch.

Immediately after the death of Kabir at Magahar, Bhagwandas is said to have left for Pithauragarh, his native place presently part of Uttarakhand. He tried to spread Kabir's message from there but soon realized it was doomed to fail in Pithauragarh.<sup>26</sup> Finally he, along with his close disciple, Ghanshyam, left for Chatiya where they had earlier lived with Kabir himself. While they were settling down in Chatiya, they faced frequent visit of floods, a real dampener to their newly initiated mission. They thus moved away to a safer place. In search of a safe place for the development of a devotional centre, they found Barharawa,



situated at a distance of about a Km from Chatiya, safer than the former. Hence they built another *jhonpara* as an alternative abode, during the onslaught of floods. The *Bijak* of Kabir, an authentic text containing Kabir's *vanis*, is said to be given final shape there by Bhagwandas during the spare time while he was staying at these centers.

Tradition has it that Bhagwan Das breathed his last in 1576,<sup>27</sup> but there is no unanimity among the followers as to where did he expire. A group of informants recalls that Bhagwandas had undertaken whirlwind tours to the Kabir *vad* in the present Gujarat, Kudoormal and Mau Sihiniya in Madhya Pradesh and then on return journey to Belsand, Sisauni, Hingana, Sugauli, Madhavpur, Rehura, Devapur in Bihar and Magahar etc. From Magahar, all of a sudden he is said to have disappeared from public view. Another group however recalls that he had spent his last days along with Jagodas in Cuttack.<sup>28</sup> Jagodas is said to have taken him to task for some mistakes he had committed in compiling *Bijak*, leading him to take *jal-samadhi* in the river Narayani-Gandak near Sonapur in Bihar. Yet another group believe that he had disappeared from Pavapuri in present Nalanda district while returning from Danapur, Maner, Fulwarisharif and Biharsharif. Whatever be the fact, we at the present stage of our research cannot be sure of the place where he had breathed his last.

Bandhogarh has been another place where Kabir, in all probability, travelled and stayed there as a guest in the present Bandhogarh fort of the Baghel *raja*.<sup>29</sup> It is said that the then *raja* Veer Singh Baghela came to know of the divine character of Kabir through his immediate disciple, popularly famous as Dharamdas. Dharamdas originally named Judavan Prasad of Bandhogarh was

born in 1452 (v.s). He belonged to a wealthy family of Kasaundhan *bania* of the region and used to travel extensively in connection with his family business. He only dashed against Kabir in Mathura where Kabir was staying. Judavan too was on pilgrimage in Mathura. At the very first glance, Judavan got drawn towards Kabir and felt spiritually connected to him. Yet it took him another two years to meet Kabir but in Kashi, a reunion after which Judavan could not return home as a businessman. From 1520 (v.s), Judavan became Dharmadas and turned into a constant company of his *sadguru* Kabir. It is also said that Dharmadas now onwards decided to dedicate his entire paternal properties to the spread of Kabir's message. Very soon Dharmadas' paternal home itself emerged as a center for the dissemination of Kabir's message during his life-time. Nonetheless, the *Acharya* of the *Dharmdasi Vansh gaddi* claims its legitimacy to the putative blessings of Kabir once showered on Dharmadas stating that his descendants, for the next 42 generations, would continue to spread Kabir's teachings, a standpoint which has been a source of persistent criticism and strong disputes both within and outside the Dharmadas' family, resulting in its repeated division as it grew as a distinct branch of the *panth* in time.

Tradition says that it was primarily Dharmadas' persuasion that Kabir undertook his journey towards Central and West India. On the way was his native place under the political control of the Baghel *raja* who himself decided to honour Kabir as his own guest in the Bandhogarh fort, where, still the room in which Kabir had stayed is well maintained and preserved by the State Archaeological Department, Madhya Pradesh.<sup>30</sup>

Kabir's visit to Bandhogarh may be seen in the context of the well documented antagonistic relationship between Hindu *raja* of Baghel dynasty and Sikandar Lodi during the Delhi Sultanate period. Baghel's capital was in Bandhogarh. The political enmity between the two becomes important for two apparent reasons; first Kabir's life is full of the legends of Sikandar's hostile treatment to Kabir. It is said Kabir was put to 52 types of punitive ordeals of Sikandar Lodi before Sikandar recognized and surrendered to Kabir's supreme divinity. Seen in a hostile context, Kabir's visit to Bandhogarh acquires different connotation as the Bandhogarh rulers had been at loggerheads with Lodi rulers for several years as recoded by historians. Kabir's visit to the hostile *raja* of Bandhogarh or *raja's* own overtures to meet or win blessings of a saintly figure who himself was a victim of Sikandar Lodi makes a lot of sense. Ultimately Sikandar Lodi had to reconcile to the position and privileges of Baghel *raja*. Secondly Dharamdas' own decision to dedicate his entire property to the cause of Kabir may have necessitated Kabir to be present physically, at least once, at the site of a future devotional centre being opened in the central India.

Dharamdas is said to have remained a constant companion of Kabir till his death in Jagannathpuri in 1568 (v.s). His *samadhi* still exists within the precincts of the Kabir-Chaura math, in the Jagdishpuri area of *Jagannathpuri* in Orissa. It is said that he died in the presence of Kabir, who, as his *sadguru*, had given him final adieu.

The spokesman of the *Dharmadasi* branch further adds that while Kabir himself gave final touch to Dharmadas' *Samadhi* in Jagannathpuri, he had also directed Dharmadas's sons to carry on his teachings to the extent possible by means of the resources

Dharmadas had already dedicated to the cause. This undefined time-span of Kabir's wish for keeping alive his message by Dharamdas' descendants particularly for the specific term of 42 generations, has been at the root of several disputed issues still unresolved between the *Dharmadasi* and the *non-Dharmadasi* branches of the Kabirpanth.<sup>31</sup> Nonetheless, it is, for sure that, by the end of sixteenth century, Bandhogarh and its surrounding areas had come under palpable influence of Kabir, as both of the Dharmadas's sons-Narayan Das and Churamani Das, enthusiastically had taken up the tasks of spreading Kabir's message. Churamani Das, as the carrier of Kabir's message after Dharamdas, also became another companion of Kabir till the latter's death in Magahar as has been shown in the Dharamdasi religious scriptures.

There has, of course, been a ragging uncertainty about the time of *Dharamdas* himself. To the group opposed to the *Dharmadasi* tradition, *Dharmadas* was not an immediate disciple of Kabir. To most of the Dharmadasi followers, however he was the most prominent and closest disciple of Kabir. Those who consider Dharamdas a contemporary of Kabir offer both documented and oral evidences in support of their standpoint. They compare the life-time of *Dharmadas* with that of the contemporary *raja* of Bandhogarh, whose genealogy can be seen well documented in their official publications *Rewa-Darpan*. Some of the Dharmdasi scriptures too mention Dharamdas as being contemporary of *raja* Ram of Bandhogarh (1592-1645).<sup>32</sup> The Baghel dynasty is historically associated with the Baghelkhand region of Northern Madhya Pradesh (centred in Satna, Rewa, and Shahdol Districts) and not with Varanasi.

Considering the genealogy of royal dynasty as given in the scholarly works on the Bandhogarh or Rewa kingdom, Raja Ram had been the common refrain for first three *rajās* of the Bandhogarh, who had all added a number of temples dedicated to Hindu God 'Ram', within the Bandhogarh Fort. The name of the successor *rajās* of Veer Singh Deo or Baghel are reported to be Virbhanu Singh Deo and Ramchandra Singh deo, both the names of Ram and Ramchandra traditionally echoing the same personality in the popular Hindu mythology, has created all the confusion about the date and period of the Dharamdas. However, the whole confusion is over for ever if we start with the time of Veer Singh Baghel or Deo as mentioned in many a non-Dharamdasi scriptures, particularly written by the publication division of the Kabir-Chaura and the *Bhagtahi* branches. Both the rival groups have consensus that Veer Singh had been one of the favourite *rajās* of Kabir, who had also accepted Kabir as his *Sadguru*.

But the *non*-Dharamdasi branches have been trying their best to create a new historical figure named Veer Singh Deo or Baghel as the then *naresh* of Kashi where Kabir was born. None of the existing scholarly works on the political history of Kashi kingdom however mention Veer Singh as the ruling *raja* or *naresh* of Kashi. In fact the scholarly works on the Kashi kingdom<sup>33</sup> point out that the Kashi kingdom was under the rule of a different dynasty having no link with the Baghel dynasty of Baghel *rajās*. In all probability, the creation of Veer Singh as the ruler of the Kashi and accepting him as the constant supporter and an obedient disciple had been a striking example of extrapolation of the actual Veer Singh Baghel who had been a ruling *raja* of the Bandhogarh, having its capital at Rewa. The extrapolation of

Veer Singh as the *naresh* of Kashi, seen in the retrospect, seems to be the lone means left for the functionaries of the Kabir-Chaura math which has been staking its claim as the *mulgadi* (chief or principal seat) of Kabir or of the Kabirpanth, for that matter, all through its history.

Although no historical source directly associates King Virasimha Baghel with Varanasi, Madhava's *Virabhanudayakavyam* does claim that Virasimha's grandfather Bhaidachandra had conquered Gaya, Varanasi, and Prayag.<sup>34</sup> David N. Lorenzen has noted the Baghel-Khand city of Rewa is located only about 190 kilometers (in a straight line) to the southwest of Benaras. He further points that in all probability, the Virasimhadev Baghel mentioned in Ananta-das's *Kabir Parachai* is the same as the Virasimha Baghel of the *Virabhanudayakavyam*. However unhistorical the *panda* of Jagannath legend may be, the indicated historical synchronism of Kabir and Virasimha Baghel is still important.<sup>35</sup>

Veer Singh had been considered as the the most powerful and the resourceful person among those who were present at the time of foundation of the Kabir-Chaura as a centre of devotion of Kabir. In fact the royal power of Veer Singh is also said to have played a very crucial role in resolving the volatile and tense moments of the ensuing tussle between Muslim and Hindu disciples following Kabir's death.

Tradition has it that it was *raja* Veer Singh who manoeuvred the tense moment in such a manner that Kabir's dead body was secretly lifted away from Magahar overnight, replacing it by a few pieces of flowers underneath the covering *Kafan*, resulting in the formation of a myth associated both with the life of Kabir as well as Guru Nanak.<sup>36</sup> Veer Singh is also said to have played a

pivotal role in the selection of the formal caretaker of the place where Kabir had spent larger part of his life. Nonetheless, he had made a major contribution in the infrastructural development of the centre thus being initiated both as the memorable abode of Kabir as well as the carrier of Kabir's legacy for entire humanity. Given the multi-dimensional role of Veer Singh in the initiation of the Kabir-Chaura, both the scholars and the writers of the *non-Dharmdasi* branch could take the risk of denying Veer Singh Deo or Baghel's role during the earliest phase of the institutional growth of the Kabirpanth, yet they have tried their best to obfuscate his actual historicity just to meet their single point objective of delinking him from Dharamdas, who had probably introduced Veer Singh to Kabir.

It becomes imperative to review what is known about King Virasimha Baghel. My discription of this theme is however entirely based on the study of David N. Lorenzen. Ananta-Das' *Kabir Parachai*, Virasimhadev Baghel is identified as the king who does penance before Kabir during the episode of the *panda* of Jagannathpuri. Virasimhadev Baghel is apparently the King of Varanasi, although Ananta-das'' texts never directly say so. Later legends also associate Virasimha Baghel as well as Bijali Khan with the events of Kabir's death at Magahar. This death legend is also found in the above book, but this text does not mention the presence of any King at Kabir's death, nor of Bijali Khan Pathan or Virasimha Baghel.

A verse chronicle of the dynasty in *Sanskrit*, the *Virabhanudaya-kavyam*, was written by a Madhava in A.D 1540, he was the son of Abhayachandra.<sup>37</sup> Another historical chronicle of the Baghel dynasty, the *Baghelavamshavarnam*, was published as an appendix to the A.D. 1906 Venkateshvar press edition of the

*Kabir Bijak*.<sup>38</sup> This text was written in Hindi by Yugal-das at the behest of the Baghel King Raghurajasimha (A.D. 1823-1879). Madhava's *Virabhanudayakavyam* contains no mention of Kabir, but the text does make Virasimha Baghel, a contemporary of the Mughal emperor Babur (ruled A.D. 1526-1530).<sup>38</sup> Virasimha Baghel is also mentioned in Babur's own memoirs.<sup>39</sup> Madhava further claims that Virasimha's son Virabhanu, the hero of the *Virabhanudayakavyam*, was contemporary and friend of the Mughal emperor Humayun. Hirananda Shastri however claims that Virabhanu must have died in 1540, the year in which Madhava's text was composed, but historians generally place his death a few years later.<sup>40</sup> Some Persian historians, seem to claim that Bir Singh (alias Nar Singh ) died after an unsuccessful battle against Sikander Lodi in About A.D 1494. Apparently, however, this claim confuses him with his cousin (uncle's son) Vahararaya.<sup>41</sup> In Madhava's *Virabhanudayakavyam*, Virasimha is said to have ruled from his capital at Gahora, a still unidentified site in the Baghelkhand region.<sup>42</sup> He should thus not be confused with King Virasimhadev of Bundelkhand who was responsible for the death of Akbar's famous minister Abu'l Fazl in A.D. 1602.<sup>43</sup> Yugal- Das's *Baghelavamshavarnam* like a sectarian literature, does connect Virasimha Baghel and other Kings of the dynasty with Kabir. The text is in fact presented in the form of the dialogue between Kabir and his reputed direct disciple Dharamdas. The text makes all the Kings of the Baghel dynasty followers of Kabir. Virasimha Baghel is said to have lived first at Prayag (Allahabad ) and then to have been given control of the fort of Bandhogadh (Shahdol district) by the *Badshah* of Delhi. This *badshah* must be Babur, although Yugal-das does not identify him by name<sup>44</sup> as Madhava does in the



*Virabhanudayakavya*. Yugal-das does describe Virasimha's son Virabahnu as the contemporary and friend of Babur's son Humayun as does Madhava.<sup>45</sup>

The Baghel dynasty and region named after it, have many historical ties with the Kabirpanth.<sup>46</sup> The ethnographers R.V. Russell and Hera Lal reported in 1916 that the members of the ruling Baghel family of Rewa State were traditionally Kabirpanthis.<sup>47</sup> According to Gangashran Shastri, not only king Virasimha Baghel but also King Ramasimha Baghel of Rewa were associated with the *panth*.<sup>48</sup>

Two important legends also connect Kabir with Puri and Jagannath temple.<sup>49</sup> David N. Lorenzen opines that the original responsibility for this connection between the *Kabir Panth* and Puri may well lie with Virasimha Baghel's brother.

According to Mohan Singh,<sup>50</sup> a Sikh scholar, Bir Singh Dev and his grandfather Bhira Dev were both contemporaries of Sikandar Lodi whose attack in 1485 on Rewah during the reign of Bhira Dev was faced by Bir Singh Dev at *Khan Ghati*. In his view Sikandar's purported association with Kabir made Kabir's biographers bring in Bir Singh Dev. Otherwise, Kabir's real contemporary would be Bhira or Narhar Dev. Narhar Dev immediately preceded Bhira Dev; now Bir Singh Dev is also spoken of as Nar Singh by Babur; therefore, the later writers on Kabir would confuse Narhar, the predecessor of Bhira, with Bhira's successor.

A nineteenth century much later Baghel King of Rewa named Vishvanathasimha (A.D. 1789-1854) wrote the well-known *Pakhanda Khandini*, a commentary on the *Bijak* of Kabir. This commentary is in fact linked to the earliest published text of the *Bijak*, lithographed in A.D. 1868.<sup>51</sup> Vishvanathasimha's grandson

Ramanujaprasadasimha financed the 1906 Venkateshwar press edition of the *Bijak*, which contains that includes this commentary and the *Baghelavamshavarnan*.

The Baghel dynasty is also said to have been associated with other leaders of the sant movement. Legends claim that Kabir's fellow disciple Sen, a barber by caste, became the *guru* of King *Rajaram* of Bandhogarh. Yugal-das's *Baghelavamshavarnan* seems to treat Rajaram and Ramasimha as alternate names of the same King, the son of Virabhanu and grandson of Virasimha. This book claims that the barber Sen treated the wounds of King Ramasimha after an attack that took place previous to an interview with Akbar. It does not, however, have Sen replace Kabir as the king's *guru*. According to D. Varma, the Baghel king, Raghurajasimha (A.D.1823-1879), the son of Vishvanathasimha, the *Bijak* commentator, wrote an important commentary on Nabha-das's *bhaktamal*.<sup>52</sup>

The tradition prevailing in the Bandhogarh region leads us to believe that there does exist a close relationship between the Dharamdasi and the royal family of Bandhogarh till date. Some members of the royal family still considers Kabir as their *guru* and also pays respect to the *Vansh gaddi* of the *Dharmdasi* branch at Damakheda, Chhattisgarh. The oldness of their intimate connection with Kabir is also immortalized by dedicating a Kabir temple at the venue where kabir had personally stayed, and the Dharamdas palace within the closed four walls of the celebrated Bandhogarh fort of the *raja*.<sup>53</sup> It is said that Dharamdas palace stands at the place where Dharamdas' own *haveli* once existed during his own life.

Onward tours of Kabir from Bandhogarh towards Western India is said to have very deeply affected people living in various parts

of the present Gujarat and parts of Maharashtra. The most important place where he stayed has been famous till the present as Kabir Vad which is presently under the custody of Gujarat state archeology department. K.K Bhatt,<sup>54</sup> who has done a commendable study on the growth of Kabirpanth in Gujarat, points out that Tattva and Jeeva, local inhabitant, had been waiting for years for a saintly person who could bring back life to the dying tree called *Vad* tree planted in their home's courtyard. Tattva and Jeeva are said to have been priest of the Brahmins' living in and around Mangaleshwar, a *qasba* situated near present Kabir Vad in Gujarat. They had taken such a resolution on their own that the sant whose presence would be miraculous enough to restore the life of Vad, they would surrender themselves to him/her and accept him their *guru*.

While Kabir was touring parts of Gujarat, he happened to visit their courtyard too. To their great astonishment, the drying plant began to get greener gradually as soon as they poured down residual *Charanamrit* down to the roots of the dying *Vad* tree. They instantly bowed down to Kabir's feet and prayed him to accept them as his disciples. Tattva-Jeeva, the Brahmin brothers-duo thus became two of his earliest disciples, and the rejuvenated tree emerged as Kabir's center of devotion. (An inscription on the Kabir temple at the Kabir Vad dates 1465 (v.s) traditionally as the year of his visit to the place.

### Kabir Vad, Gujrat.

**For more photos of the same, see annexure-51**

Kabir is said to have visited parts of Gujarat more than once. In its trail, a number of centers of devotion in Kabir's name came

into existence at several other places during the sixteenth century itself. One Nirwan Maharaj, initially a Ramanandi follower of Jayal math, had also turned to Kabir once he met the latter. From Nirwan Maharaj, he became Nirwan Sahib and afterwards committed himself to devote his entire life to the spread of Kabir's teachings from his previous centre in Surat. Although Nirwan had met Kabir first at the Kabir Vad, Nirwan had also successfully persuaded Kabir to visit his centre in Surat too. It is said that most of the Ramanandi followers of Nirwan too got drawn to Kabir as their *Sadguru*, and became his disciples.

Kabir's Brahmin disciples Tatva and Jeeva of Gujarat are also first mentioned in Nabhadas's *Bhaktamal*, but the commentator, Priyadas,<sup>55</sup> is the first author to explicitly connect them with Kabir as Lorenzen's study points out. According to this legend, Tatva and Jeeva were brothers who had decided to accept as their *Guru* the first holy man who could pass their test. They washed their saintly guests' feet and poured the water (*charanamrit* thus obtained) on a dry stick they had planted in the ground. The water that made the stick grow, would identify their future *guru*. The water from Kabir's feet instantly had the desired effect, and Tatva and Jeeva accepted him as their *Guru*. Their caste fellows objected to the fact that Kabir was a lowly *julaha*, however. Further they refused to marry into Tatva and Jeeva's family and they relented only when Tatva and Jeeva threatened to marry their own children to each other (i.e., a parallel cousin marriage). Presently Tatva and Jeeva are believed to have been the founders of the *Phatuha* branch of the Kabirpanth in Bihar.

Another towering figure popularly known Gyaniji is also said to have become Kabir's disciple during one of his Gujarat tours.

Gyani's original name was Chatar Singh Bhatti. Based on contemporary evidences, Kanti Kumar Bhatt had found that Chatar Singh was a *raja* of Jaisalmer presently part of *Rajasthan*, but had relinquished his royal palace to remain constantly in the service of Kabir, his *sadguru*. A temple of Gyani ji was built at *qasba* Sanjhapur near Kabir Vad on the Southern bank of Narmada. His *samadhi* still exists within the temple complex. Bhatt, in support of his findings quotes, *sakhi, granth* of Gyaniji "*Manchi vadi parahari, samundra vass. Tahan gyan nirbhay bhaya, kaaljaal nahin paas.*"<sup>56</sup>

Kabir's disciple Padmanabh was first mentioned in Nabhdas's *Bhaktamal*. David N Lorenzen has mistakenly considered him hailing from Banares. According to Gangasaran Shastri,<sup>57</sup> Padmanabh cured a merchant of leprosy by telling him to bathe in the Ganges and recite the name of Ram three times. Kabir later admonished Padmanabh for having had too little faith since even a 'hint' of the name would have cured the merchant.

The widening ideological (super-structural) base of the Kabirpanth was thus getting strong as evident in a number of legends, *vanis*, miracles being narrated in medieval religious and semi-religious texts by the turn of the seventeenth century. David N Lorenzen<sup>58</sup> has recently offered us a scholarly exposition of legends and miracles as found in then literary texts. In the following we can have some idea of the Kabir as discussed in the popular and scholarly circles.

While he still a child, Kabir is said to have developed a strong interest in the *vaishnava* religion. It disturb his family, especially his mother. A time came, some point, often said to be while Kabir was still a child, Kabir decided that he would be initiated by the well-known Brahmin Guru Ramanand, the founder of the

Ramanadi *panth*. Since Kabir had a Muslim background, Ramanand would not agree to initiate him. Kabir then went out and lay down on the path that Ramanand took early in the morning in dim light on his way to his bath in the Ganges. When he stepped on Kabir, Ramanand exclaimed, 'Ram! Ram!' and Kabir took this to be the *mantra* for his entire life. When Ramanand later learned that Kabir was going to claim to be his disciple, Ramanand called him to admonish him, Kabir reminded Ramanand of what had happened on the path to the river. He also impressed Ramanand, his teacher, with his religious knowledge and insight. He then openly accepted Kabir as his disciple. Some sources also allude to an incident where Kabir miraculously told Ramanand, who was hidden behind a screen, how to solve a problem in placing a garland around the neck of a *Vaishnava* idol. The legend of Kabir's initiation is first told in the *Niranjani panth* recension of Anantadas's *Kabir parachai* and is found in almost all later legend collections.<sup>59</sup>

Another popular legend talks of Kabir while he was in the market to sell a piece of cloth, God in the form of a poor Brahmin appeared to test him. The Brahmin begged for some cloth from Kabir, who promptly tore his own cloth in half and gave one half to the Brahmin. The Brahmin begged for the other half and Kabir gave him that as well. Ashamed, Kabir returned home without money or cloth and went off to hide (or to meditate in some versions) for several days. Meanwhile God, in the disguise of a merchant, came to Kabir's home and gave Kabir's mother a bullock-cart loaded with foodstuffs. The god clarified that it was a gift for Kabir to give great feast. This legend is first told by Anantadas and is found in several later sources. It is not

particularly popular in the Kabirpanth, however, perhaps because it shows Kabir working as a poor weaver.

Kabir then decided to hold a feast for the devotees (*bhagats*) visiting him, but this angered the local Brahmins and *sanyasis* who complained that Kabir had 'given everything to the *shudras*'. Kabir agreed to feed the Brahmins and sanyasis as well, but, in fact, he simply went off to hide (or meditate) since he, had no money to buy more food. The god came to his rescue again but in the form of Kabir himself and gave two and one-half *sers* (kilos) of food to every Brahmin and synanyasis. This legend is told by Anantadas<sup>60</sup> and many later writers.

A legend also associates Kabir with Gorkhnath. One day the *yogi* Gorkhnath (or one of his followers) came to challenge Kabir (or his Guru Ramanand) to a debate. Gorkh had planted his iron trident into the ground and climbed up and sat on the prongs. He then dared Kabir to come up to have a debate. Kabir accepted the challenge and threw a thread up into the air to climb up and sat over that. Gorakh yielded and had to acknowledge defeat. This legend is not told by Anantadas or Priyadas, but it is found in many *Kabir panthi* collections. Paramanand's *Kabir Mansur* <sup>61</sup> adds two more episodes. In one, Gorkh is said to have challenged Kabir to find him in a pond in which the former had transformed into a frog. Kabir grabbed him anyway. Kabir then successfully hid in the pond by changing himself into the water itself. In the other event, Gorkh is said to have sent two cobras to bite Kabir, but Kabir compassionately treated them as guests and they did not harm him.

As Kabir was growing in a stature, it became more difficult for him to avoid the crowds who came to see him. To rid himself of this problem, Kabir went out to the market with his arm around

a prostitute while pretending to drink liquor from a jug. When Kabir reached the court of King Vir Sinha Bhagel, who had highest regard for him before this event, the king could not believe his eyes and treated him utter snub. Kabir then poured out the water from his jug on his own feet. The king asked why he had done this. Kabir explained that at that very moment a priest of the temple of jagannath in the distant city of Puri had dropped a pot of boiling water on his feet. Kabir had poured out his cool water to save the priest from getting burned. King Vir Simha Bhagel did not believe the story and sent some messengers by fast camels to Puri to verify it. They did so and returned with their wide eyes in astonishment. The King felt obliged to come to Kabir as a penitent to ask forgiveness. Kabir happily forgave him saying: 'There is no anger in my heart. For me there is no question of either hatred or love, or any difference between king and commoner.' This story is told by Anantadas and many later authors, though some Kabirpanthi authors such as Brahmalinamuni<sup>62</sup> prudishly omit the episode with the prostitute. This legend is a complex one that involves several interesting social and psychological role inversions.<sup>63</sup>

A legend about Kabir, his wife and libidinous merchant is found in the *Dabistan-i-mazahib*, written in 1645, a Persian text attributed to Muhsin Fani, a visitor from then Persia,<sup>64</sup> (we have a very detail over view of *Dabistan-i-mazahib* written by Purshotam Aggrwal in his recent book *Akath Kahani Prem Ki, Kabir Ki Kavita aur Unka Samay*) and also in Mahipati's *Bhaktavijay*.<sup>65</sup> Since many *sadhus* of the Kabirpanth deny that Kabir was ever married, the legend is not found in the Kabirpanthi sources. In actual fact, the legend seems to have been imported, as Lorenzen points out, from the cycle of legends



about the *nirguni* saint, Pipa, and his faithful wife Sita and originally had no relation with Kabir.<sup>66</sup>

According to Paramanand's *Kabir Mansur*,<sup>67</sup> one day Kabir, Shaikh Farid and Kamal (Kabir's son) arrived at the house of a poor devotee named Samman. Since there was no food in the house, Samman and his son Seu went out to rob sufficient food to feed their honoured guests. They made a hole in the wall of a merchant's house, and Seu went in to find what they needed.

As Seu leaving through the hole, the Merchant grabbed his foot. Seu then asked his father to cut off his head so that no one would know who had stolen the food. Samman did so and took the food and his son's head home. Samman's wife prepared the food and sent out the three plates for their guests to eat. Kabir insisted that Samman, his wife and their son, Seu eat together with them. When Kabir called for Seu to come and the severed head responding that his body was somewhere else. On Kabir's order that he must come, the headless body came running and replaced its own head. All six of them then sat down to eat. This legend originally seems to have had no connection with Kabir. Anantadas made it the theme of another of his *parachai* without mentioning Kabir. In Mahipati's *Bhaktavijay*,<sup>68</sup> roughly the same story is told, but here Kabir and his son Kamal take the roles of Samman and his son, Seu and Kabir accordingly beheads Kamal. One of the most popular of all Kabir legends, told in virtually all collections, is that of his encounter with *sultan* Sikander Lodi. Accordingly, to Anantadas version,<sup>69</sup> when Sikander visited Benares, Kabir's enemies among the *qazis*, *Mullahs*, *Brahmins*, and *Baniyas*, and even his own mother, went to complain to Sikander about his religious redicalism. Sikander summoned Kabir and ordered that he atone for his apostasy. Kabir reiterated

his faith in Ram fearlessly. Sikandar could not tolerate Kabir's audacity and in fury, ordered him to be chained and thrown into the Ganges. When Kabir entered the water, the chain fell off and started floating unharmed. Then he was tied to a pile of firewood. Even as the fire was lit, the flames turned as cool as water. Frustrated, Sikandar called for a wild elephant to be brought to trample on Kabir. The elephant refused to trample on Kabir. Sikandar finally accepted Kabir's innocence and offered him great riches. Kabir however refused the gifts and returned home. Later version of this legend adds many further ordeals and sometimes have Kabir cure Sikandar of a bad fever. These versions also introduce the figure of Shaikh Taki, who is the principal enemy responsible for instigating Sikandar to subject Kabir to the terrible ordeals.

Several Kabirpanthi collections also mention that Kabir had accompanied Sikandar to Prayag (Allahabad) where Shaikh Taki challenged Kabir to revive a dead body floating in the Ganges. On Kabir's summon, the corpse came to life and became Kabir's adopted son, Kamal. This Kamal seems to have been a historical person and a religious poet in his own right. Kamali is said to have originally been the daughter of Shaikh Taki offered to place his faith in Kabir if he would revive her. When Kabir did so, Kamali renounced her natural father and claimed Kabir as her adopted father. According to Lorenzen's study Kamal and Kamali are not mentioned by Anantadas or Priyadas.

Kabirpanthi scriptures contain a number of legends about the travels of Kabir. During these travels, he is said to have met Guru Nanak with whom he travelled to Mecca. This exploit of Guru Nanak is well known from Sikh sources. These sources do not mention Kabir's presence on the trip, but several claim that Kabir

and Guru Nanak met more than once.<sup>70</sup> On other journeys, Kabir had also met a southern Brahmin named Ramadas, visited the ashram founded by Ramanuja at Totadri in south India, and also travelled to Balkh in Afganistan, where he met the *Sultan*, Shah Ibrahim Adham, the protagonist of a well-known cycle of *sufi* legends. None of these legendary journeys of Kabir need be recounted in detail here. Most of the episodes in these legends seem to be imported and adapted from legends originally associated with other religious figures. Nonetheless, we don't have adequate reliable evidence to historically verify these legendary meetings.

During his time as a religious saint, Kabir is said to have had many disciples. One was a Kabir's own 'brother-disciple' Raidas. In Anantadas's *Raidas Paracai* (2000), Kabir and Raidas, accompanied by their fellow disciple Sen, are said to have had a debate about the relative merits of *saguna* ('with attributes') and *nirguna* (without attributes) concept of God. Despite the intervention of Vishnu on Raidas's side, Kabir's arguments in favour of a strict *nirguna* concept is said to have prevailed. Raidas eventually accepted defeat and from then on considered Kabir to be his *Guru*. The debate itself is recounted in a Hindi text attributed to Sen.<sup>71</sup>

The first of the last three important legends about Kabir as described by Anantadas and Priyadas, also found in later Kabirpanthi collections, narrates how some Brahmins of Benares once hatched a plot against Kabir. Four Brahmins disguised themselves as *nirguni Sadhus* and travelled in different directions. They started announcing that Kabir was to give a great feast and all were invited. When the people began to arrive on the appointed day, Kabir went away and hid (or meditate).

God's (Hari) interventions was warranted and he appeared but to Kabir's rescue but in the guise of many Kabirs to greet each guest personally. He managed food for everyone to eat and also distributed cloth to all the gathered *sadhus*. These days great feasts of this sort are organized on different dates at the sites of the principal monasteries of the Kabirpanth.

The second legend describes how a celestial nymph (*apsara*) sent by Hari puts Kabir's chastity to test. Kabir however easily resisted all her attempts to seduce him. Frustrated, she returned to heaven and narrated Hari what had happened. Hari became so pleased that he gave Kabir a *darshan* of himself in his four-armed *saguna* form, and offered Kabir magical powers and limitless treasures. When Kabir said he had no need of such things, instead Hari made him 'unaging, immortal, and indestructible.'

The final legend is the one of Kabir's death and bodily ascent to heaven. This has been one of the most popular legends about Kabir. It is told in almost all collections beginning with Anantadas<sup>72</sup> and seems to be alluded to in a few verses attributed to Kabir. When Kabir realised that he was to die, he decided to go to Magahar, the place where his mazar as well as a smadhi still exists. It was then popularly believed that a person who died in Magahar would be reborn as a donkey. Challenging the deep seated superstition, Kabir went there expressly to prove that Ram could save anyone anywhere. When Kabir died, his Hindu and Muslim followers argued about what to do with the corpse: burn it or bury it. Later texts make king Vir Sinha Baghel, the leader of the Hindu and, Nawab Bijali Khan, the leader of the Muslims. All finally are said to have agreed to cover the body with flowers. When they later looked for the corpse,

they discovered that only flowers remained. Anantadas, as per Lorenzen's study, ends this legend with Kabir greeted in heaven by all the gods and divine forces. Vishnu tells him: heaven is yours: live here forever.

This cycle of legends can be analysed from a variety of points of view. We have already noted that many academic scholars have attempted to use the legends to extract a historical biography of Kabir, but a strict critical approach to this task yields a disappointing minimum of information. Charlotte Vaudeville,<sup>73</sup> for instance, laments that the legendary life of Kabir follows well-known patterns of Indian hagiography. Nonetheless, these patterns are themselves historical products of considerable interest and are not as well known as Vaudeville suggests. To Lorenzen, these patterns need to be identified and then compared to those of the legendary lives of saints and heroes from other traditions. Another interesting question is that of the history of these legends themselves – where they come from and how they evolve? Finally, and this is one of the most interesting question, what socio-economic and religious ideologies are found in the legends? How do the legends express the religious, social, and economic need of those who tell them and those who listen to them? To me, many of these legends have their origin in the gradual process of the Brahminisation and co-option of the Kabir's legacy within the Puranic tradition of Hindu mythology.

As Vaudeville noted, there do exist "patterns of Hindu hagiography in which the cycle of Kabir legends may be located. In another essay, Lorenzen has attempted to make a detailed comparison of the legend cycle of seven *nirguni* saints who have

acquired the most complete cycle : Dadu Dayal, Haridas, Niranjani, Kabir, Namadev, Guru Nanak, Pipa, and

shows that the basic features common to all most of these cycle are the following(1) all the saints belong to non-Brahmin castes- three belong to *kshatriya* castes and four to artisan castes (2) in at least three of the cycle (Kabir , Namadev and Raidas), legend prominently mention one or more previous lives of the saints (3) all but two cycle include legend about the unusual events that surround the saint's birth.(4) in all the cycle but one (Haridas), the saint displays evidence of his religious vocation early in life. (5) All the saints have a decisive encounter with a human *guru*, a divine vision, a divine voice, some combination of these three, which leads to their adopting a religious vocation. (6) All the saints were married (although Kabir remains celibate in Kabirpanthi texts), but several of them either abandon their families or quarrel with their wives because of their religious vocation. (7) All have various encounters with some combination of petitioners, gods, animals, ghosts, thieves, *Brahmins*, *Baniyas*, Muslim holy men, and kings. All these encounters lead to tests of the virtues or miraculous power of the saint (8) three of the

saints (Dadu Dayal, Kabir and Guru Nanak) are said to have named their own successor before their deaths. Not surprisingly, these are the three whose followers organized the biggest sectarian movements. (9) Unusual events are said to surround the deaths of these same three saints.

### Kabir's Immediate Followers

Some of Kabir's immediate disciples, as stated above, are said to have been the founders of important branches of the Kabirpanth. Most Kabirpanthi sources claim that Kabir had four principal disciples: Dharamdas, Srutigopal, Bhagavandas, and Jagudas. None of these disciples are mentioned by Anantadas or Priyadas.<sup>75</sup> The two most important figures are Dharamdas and Srutigopal, the latter being shown as a close companion in the Dharamdasi scriptures.

Dharamdas was a pious and well-to-do *Baniya* merchant from the town of Bandhogadh in the Baghelkhand region. He first met Kabir at Mathura where he witnessed some miracles of the former. Eventually both Dharamdas and his wife Amini Devi became important disciples of Kabir. Both also became religious figures in their own right. One day Kabir announced that Dharamdas's son Muktamani (Churamani Das) was to become the head of the Kabirpanth and establish his seat (*gaddi*) in Bandhogarh which was later shifted first to Kudarmal (Bilaspur District). The monastery at Kudarmal still exists, but the *gaddi* of the *Dharmadasi* branch of the Kabir *panth* has since been moved

several times and now is divided between rival branches with their main centers at Kharsiya and Damakhera. According to Mahesh Das, *Dhramdas* has been the fourth immediate disciple of Kabir who initiated a new Kabirpanth branch from Bandhogarh, presently situated in Madhya Pradesh.

Born in 1452, he got married at the age of 28 to Sulakshna Devi of Patharaha village, the latter came to be known as Ameen Mata after initiation into the Kabirpanth. Dhramdas before meeting Kabir was named as Judawandas, and religiously had been a *sagun* follower of Swami Rupdasji in Vithaleshwar. He had by then got two sons-Narayandas and Churamandas. It is said Judawan underwent total transformation when he met Kabir in Mathura in VS 1519.<sup>76</sup> It is also said that in the following year, *Dhramdas* succeeded in persuading Kabir to visit his native land, Bandhogarh, from where he left towards Western India..

His elder son Narayan Das did not concede to take *virakta* life, hence decided to spread Kabir's message as a householder from Bandhogarh itself whereas Churaman Das agreed to follow *virakt* life. His name too was thus changed to Muktamani Sahib. During his life itself, *Dhramdas* is said to have spent all his resources of 56 crores which he had inherited and accumulated as a successful merchant. He had become a constant companion of Kabir as long he was alive. It was one of his stays along with Kabir in Jagannathpuri that both *Dhramdas* and Ameena took their last breath within the present complex of the Kabir-Chaura math, Jagannathpuri, Orissa. Their *Samadhis* are preserved side by side along with some others.



## Gujarat

Tradition has it that Kamaal, either the son or the disciple of Kabir, had profound influence in Gujrat region particularly. Oral tradition prevalent in Kabirpanth suggests that Kabir himself had asked Kamaal to visit towards Ahmedabad in particular and surrounding areas in general. Parashuram Chaturvedi<sup>77</sup> has indicated, in his study that the compelling reason to send Kamaal to Ahmedabad had been the tyrannical rule of then *sultan* of Ahmedabad. On reaching there, Kamaal had to face the ordeals of the sultan before he could impress upon the latter to behave humanly with the common people irrespective of their religious affiliations. Mukund,<sup>78</sup> a Gujrati poet, has also described Kamaal's religious tours in parts of Gujrat . As described in these texts, Kamaal also spent two days in Surat, where he was given special treatment by Nirwan sahib.

Above all Kabir could initiate Padmnabh into his own path while he was travelling in the then capital of Gujrat, Patan. Padmnabh is said to be a native of Patan, where there still exists a house locally popular as *Padmavari*; the house of Padmnabh. He had four sons and a daughter. Kanti Kumar Bhatt<sup>79</sup> cites several references from Gujrati texts Kabirpanth literature and a few manuscripts wherein Padmnabh has been shown as an eminent disciple of Kabir. He is said to have been present in Magahar while Kabir was taking his last breath. Bhatt has collected evidence to show his birth in 1458 (v.s) and death in 1565(v.s). The number of disciples already having wide following for themselves must have exerted strong effect of Kabir's teachings. They all pooled their resources together to carry forward Kabir's message. Both Nirwan sahib and Gyaniji are said to be two famous *gurus* in Surat before they had met Kabir. Similarly

Kamaal had a diverse groups of followings both in Gujrat and own parts of Mughal India. After these influential religious personalities drew towards Kabir, their followers, if not in toto, partly must have followed the change of guard of their gurus.

## Punjab

In medieval Punjab, Kabir is said to have visited a number of times and his legendary Balkh visit too must have been undertaken through it. The most reliable evidence for the existence of Kabir's followers, if not of Kabirpanth itself, is, as often cited by its disciples in Punjab, has been the *Adi Granth* of the Sikhs, which contains not less than 541 hymns of Kabir. Some of the missionaries, colonial administrators-cum-scholars; such as, Elphinston, H.H.Wilson, W.W.Hunter, Malcolm and controversial Ernest Trumpp, as well as Indian scholars; for instance, D.N.Roy and Kailash Chandra have tried to show, in their scholarly works, intimate relation between Kabir and Guru Nanak, some going to the extent of showing that there existed a sort of *guru-shisya* relationship between the two. Some Kabirpanthi Sikhs to whom I met and interviewed in parts of Punjab often cite several lines from the *Janam sakhis* of Guru Nanak written by Bhai Bala (Guru Nanak is believed to have been a regular visitor to Bhai Bala house) that alludes to Guru Nanak's gratitude towards Kabir; to quote one of these-

*Nanak Tur pahunche Darbar, jahan Baitha  
Sachha Kartar, Pas Khawasi kare kabir,  
Nirankar Ke Pas Vajir. Guru Nanak Jee Jab  
Andar Gaye, Nirankar Tab Gadagad Bhaye,  
Kabir Gale Ke satha lagaye, Adar Sahit Bahut*

*Bithaye, agya Nirankar jab Dini, Das Kabir  
Antar Bid chinhi. Kahe Kabir Sun Nank Bhagat,  
Ab tum Matlok Ko Jao, Suchi Nirmal Bhakt  
Dridhao, Sanasar sagar Ko Par Utaro... Nanak  
Prabhu Ki Agya Mani, Upades Diya Kabir Gyani.*

80

According to these educated disciples, Guru Nanak's initial interest in Kabir's *vanis* before his enlightenment developed in course of his meetings with certain groups of *sadhu mandalis* then operating in certain parts of medieval Punjab, in the neighborhood of his village, which had come under the impact of Kabir's teaching in the wake of Kabir's visit and encounter with the ruler of Balkh in the north west region, where he had earned the wrath of the *raja* during early sixteenth century. A number of legends orally narrated in the Kabirpanth community have been corroborating these encounters and have also found description in sectarian works too.

According to Mohan Singh,<sup>81</sup> Guru Amar Das must have come to know of Kabir first as a *Vaishnava bhagat* during the former's own early life as a *Vaishnava* when he used to visit Hardwar, on foot, year after year, doing it about 20 times. Later, when he ascended the *gaddi* of Guru Angad Dev in 1562, he, in a short while, sent preachers of Sikhism to all the known religious centres of India. He probably sent one to the area of Kabir's influence also. His emissaries, too, may have been instrumental in Guru Amar Das's acquisition of further knowledge about Kabir and his *Bani*, which he collected, and differed from him in his own utterances.

Some educated Kabirpanth followers<sup>82</sup> further suggest that after the death of Guru Nanakdev, Guru Ramdas, the fourth Guru of the Sikhs in particular, was so much overwhelmed by Kabir's *sabd* that he decided to give Kabir *vanis* its due place in the *Adi Granth* which was finally compiled by Guru Arjandev. To them, Guru Nanak also owes to Kabir his first lessons of the *Gurumukhi* script as it was spelt out initially in the *Bijak*, the Kabirpanth's most celebrated religious text.<sup>83</sup> Of course there are some references of the similar relationship in certain sectarian literature of Kabirpanth as well; such as, *Kabir Mansur* originally written by Parmanand in Urdu in 1864 and the *Anurag Sagar* written in 1899 suggesting that both Kabir and Nanak had a *Maun Samvad* or a sacred meeting between the two in Kashi, where the latter had visited more than once during his life-time, and that Nanakshah of Punjab and Dharamdas of present Chhattisgarh were, in fact, *Gurubhai*.<sup>84</sup>

## Orissa

While Kabir had lost one of his disciples Dharamdas in Jagannathpuri, he had found Jagodas, another able disciple who had begun to play crucial role in the initiation of the nascent Kabirpanth. Jago Das, popularly famous as Jagu or Jago, was born of a priestly couple Jagardatta and Hanso or Hansobae in 1538 (v.s) near a hamlet called Tulasiya in Cuttack coming from a Brahmin family. Jagardatta was working as a priest with the Jagannath temple. He had, therefore, shifted his residence to Jagdishpuri area in Jagannathpuri, the area where Kabir too had been staying. Jagodas drew close to Kabir and emerged as one of the immediate disciples who is credited with founding a number of centres after Kabir's name, both in Orissa and Bihar region.

Influenced by his charismatic power, the local *raja* of Cuttack is said to have donated land-tracks of 400 *bighas* on the North-eastern part of the present Cuttack city. The centre thus formed by Jagodas in Cuttack still exists but presently under the control of the *sagun* panthi management of the temple.<sup>85</sup>

It is said the Cuttack math in Orissa had been following till the early eighteenth century after which services of the Maratha marauders caused irreparable loss to the math. By then at least seven Mahants had succeeded on the *gaddi* of this math. They were: Mathura Das, Garabhudas, Vallabhdas, Shiromani Das, Dharani Das and Haridas. However, as testimonials of the past legends of these *sadhus* having headed this math are hard to find out, their *samadhis* are well preserved in the outer courtyard of the temple in the open. A recently published souvenir by the the present custodians of this temple do enlist the name of seven Mahants whose *samadhis* are preserved, but except Hari Das, no names match with the list of the Kabirpanthi Mahants as mentioned in the official records of the *Jagudasi* branch. In the situation, we cannot be sure either of the names of the Mahants or of the relationship of the *Samadhi* temple with the Cuttack math. The temple has since then become famous as the *Samadhi* temple presumably reminding us of these *samadhis* of Kabir followers.

Before his death, Jagodas is said to have undertaken his religious tours in several parts of Bihar and Orissa in addition to Oudh *suba* wherein Kashi was then situated. His popularity in parts of the present North-eastern Bihar generated a lot of intrest among general public and royal families as tradition avers. The local *raja* of Rajnagar was so much influenced by his personality that he is said to have doted him 28 *bighas* of land in Andharathadi,

presently a sub-division in the present Supaul district.<sup>86</sup>The donor Pratap Bhanu and his wife Padmavati were related to the royal families of the Darbhanga Raj, later shifted at Dharbhanga of north Bihar, a zimidar who was offered an independent status by Akbar the Great. The centre thus opened at Andharathadi by Jagodas still exists there but in a very poor condition.

The oldness of the Jagodasi math there may be further corroborated by the number of *samadhis* preserved in a large hall crying for proper maintenance by the math's functionaries. A few *samadhis* bear the names of the Mahants who were buried there, others do not have legible names. Total number of *samadhis* is 21 inside the *Samadhi* hall of the Andharathadi math.<sup>87</sup>

While these immediate followers were putting their best efforts to spread Kabir's messages in their respective places of birth in their own ways, at Kashi (Benares), where Kabir is said to have been born and stayed for the most of his life's time, a centre of devotion began to take deep roots under the able guidance of Surati Gopal,<sup>88</sup> one of the Brahmin disciples of Kabir, coming presumably from South India. We need to bear in mind that Surati Gopal just took over the charge of the religious affairs of the Kabir's *ashram* (centre) after his *Samadhi* (death) and did his best to develop it as the most respectful religious place for the followers during his tenure as the first Mahant of the math. The significance of the centre famous as the Kabir Chaura, Kashi, becomes evident as the math is said to have been developed upon the place where Kabir himself used to stay. In addition, we also note that almost all the scholars writing on Kabir or the Kabirpanth talk of its historic significance at least since the early nineteenth century.

While Kabir-Chaura gradually seems to have emerged as the generic name for all the Kabirpanth centres, particularly those where Kabir himself had spent sometime during his life time; for instance, in Jagannath Puri and in Kashi, some centres developed later adopt it to enhance their significance. *Chaura* literally means a temporary abode for taking rest. In the same sense, a branch of the name of the Kabir *samadhi* developed at Magahar, about 230 Kms from Benares, Uttar Pradesh, as Kabir is said to have stayed here before he took *samadhi* there itself. Truly speaking, maths presently existing at the site of Kabir Mazar/*samadhi* must have been one of the oldest ones of the Kabirpanth in India.

Historically the Magahar centres acquire greater significance as the divided parts of the maths have been in the charge of the two distinct groups of Kabir's followers-Hindu and Muslims. According to the prevailing legends, which has more often occupied place than not in the written accounts of scholars on Kabir beginning from Abul Fazl, Tavernier, H.H.Wison, G. H. Westcott and to all other colonial documents. Kabir's disciples comprising both of the Hindu and the Muslim religions got divided over the issue of the method of the last rites of the Kabir's dead body after his death. The dispute did not end there; rather it resulted in the split of the emerging Magahar math, marked by the division of its mausoleum into two parts, one going to the care of the Kabir-Chaura math, Benares and the remaining half to the care of the then head of his Muslim disciples.

Around the same time a centre of devotion began to take shape at a site where Kabir is said, particularly by Hindu followers, to have been born. According to the prevailing beliefs of the heads

of the *Lahartara* Kabirpanth math, *Lahartara*<sup>89</sup> math represents the actual site where Kabir's parents picked him up from the *Lahartara* pond. But the formation of the Lahartara math in the close proximity of the Kabir Chaura brought to the fore another significant development within the Kabirpanth; i.e., the increasing division of the religious sect founded after Kabir's name. The Lahartara math developed under the guidance of the head of the Dharamdasi branch centred in the present Chhattisgarh region, far-off from the Kabir-Chaura branch working from the centre of the same name situated in Banares. All these maths emerged as the nodal centres of the Kabirpanth activities both within and outside the present Uttar Pradesh and the Uttarakhand.

### Rajputana

Our informants in Rajasthan at least associate two places with Kabir's personal visits: Pushkar in Ajmer, and Kabir Pathiyal in Jaisalmer, districts. Both places are situated at about 500 kms. from each other. The long distance between the two places enhances the probability of Kabir's decision of taking rest after covering such a long distance in the early sixteenth century. The place where Kabir is said to have stayed for several days in Pushkar, there stands a splendid Kabir *ashram* but due to poor maintenance in a dilapidated condition. The area itself is popular as Kabir Chaura. As remiscence of Kabir, a pair of his *Kharaun* (wooden sandals) are still showed by the care-taker of the *ashram* (mandir).<sup>90</sup> The archaeological survey conducted by the Indira Gandhi Centre of Arts and Culture, New Delhi has measured the architectural structure of this *ashram* and has bracketed it in the seventeenth century buildings.<sup>91</sup> My project



assistants could not find any significant documentary evidence to check the date of its foundation except the prevailing tradition about it.

It is said that the *ashram* came into existence during the reign of *raja* Jaswant Singh of Marwar in Rajputana area.<sup>92</sup> However, confusion arises as to which Jaswant's Singh as there had been two Jaswant Singhs in the dynasty of the Rathor *rajas* of Jodhpur, the capital of Marwar. The former Jaswant reign spread over major part of the seventeenth century, whereas Jaswant Singh II reign continued from 1873 to 1895.<sup>93</sup> The dates help us in reconfigure the date of the foundation of Kabir *ashrams* in Jodhpur city itself which I describe in the chapter on the Kabirpanth in the eighteenth century Kabirpanth.

However, a cursory look at the history of *Dadupanth* makes it clear that highest concentration of Dadu's followers have been noted in this region of Marwar covering Pushkar, Jodhpur and Ajmer among many others. In course of time, these followers became more popular as *Dadupanthis* than Kabirpanthis in Rajasthan.

Another centre of devotion after Kabir's name emerged in the present Rajasthan. It is known as Kabir Pathiyal situated in the village Pohara 45 kms away from Jaisalmer.<sup>94</sup> It is said that Kabir himself had stayed at this place while he was on his way to the north-west India. Kabir's stay here for a fortnight is said to have transformed the character of this small lake into a mystical pond. We were told that the hut type structures still preserved at the corner of the lake were abode where Kabir had taken rest for several days during the rainy days. Two big slabs of stone lying there have the imprint of *Beja*, woven by Kabir, while sitting on the two. It is believed that if a pregnant woman partakes of its

water, she gets blessed with a male child subject to the condition that the water is lifted for the woman by a male alone. However, if a woman mistakenly lifts water, Pothiyal's water runs the risk of drying up. The popular legend of God's rescuing Kabir from the conspiracies of fanatic Brahmins is also associated with this place but with a slight modification in that Kabir himself did not stay here till the intervention of gods in arranging for a *bhandara* for all those who had gathered there as fictitious invitees of Kabir on the call of anti-Brahmin *pandits*.

## Oudh

Kabir-Chaura, after Kabir's death is however said to have gradually emerged as the leading religious place so much so that it drew the royal attention of Akbar the Great towards the end of the sixteenth century. Akbar is said to have perceived Kabir-Chaura as a potent factor in his over-all plan of the *Din-e-Ilahi* in the Mughal India. To meet this end, he is said to have first tried to win over the heart of then functionaries of the math by the offer of bestowing the math with the large tracts of the land in and around Allahabad.<sup>95</sup> However, it is said that Akbar's offer was turned down by then math's functionaries who did not then see much value in the accumulation of the material resources. Kabir-Chaura's refusal to accept Akbar's offer however proved to be a boon for the development of the Sikhs in the Punjab, as Akbar had then sent for the similar offer of the patronage and the land grant to Ramdas, the third *guru* of Sikhs, but he, too, had showed his reluctance in the imperial offer primarily because the Kabir-Chaura had already refused such offers.<sup>96</sup> Yet Ramdas is said to have sought the Kabir-Chaura's opinion on the imperial offer. The meeting, which was called for suggesting the right

course of action for the emerging of the Sikhs community in general Both the saintly assembly, and Ramdas in particular in Kashi finally decided that Ramdas could accept the imperial offer but on payment, not in charity. Subsequently, *guru* Ramdas accepted 500 *bighas* of land at the site where the holy city of Amritsar had initially developed. Accordingly, *guru* Ramdas accepted 500 *bighas* of land from Akbar which was bought at the payment of Rs. 700 way back in 1577.<sup>97</sup>

Akbar's attempts to win over the active support of the Kabir-Chaura establishment did not end there. He is said to have sent at least three emissaries, before he finally ordered Todarmal, one of the *navratnas* of his magnificent court, to prevail upon the Kabir-Chaura's functionaries, then headed by the fifth Mahant named Lal sahib.<sup>98</sup> Todarmal too failed in his endeavors and henceforth, Akbar had to change his tactics-he directed Todarmal to seek support of Tulsidas, a *sagun* sant of his time being in good book of the emperor, to help the emperor in containing the increasing influence of the Kabir-Chaura. Todarmal therefore had to permanently settle in Varanasi to effectively execute a new strategy of keeping the Kabir-chaura along with its bristling supporters neutral to the Mughal empire, if not friendly. It is said that Lal Sahib had finally agreed to accept Akbar's offer of 100 *bighas* land tracts in the then Tirhut *pargana* presently located in Bihar.<sup>99</sup>

It is probable that the first collection of Kabir's sayings was not compiled earlier than 50 years after his death."<sup>100</sup> F.E. Keay estimates that "*Bijak* is often said to have been compiled by Bhago Das about the year 1570. It was produced in connection with the Kabirpanth after the death of Kabir, probably as a book of instructions."<sup>101</sup> "The compiler may have been Bhagwan Das

and the compilation perhaps was not made till somewhere about 1600.”

The foregoing description of the available evidences thus makes it clear that Kabirpanth as ideological formations had taken roots and a few centres had also come into existence in order to nourish and propagate the ideas/teachings of Kabir, the core constituents of the emerging *panth* during the sixteenth century. Even as we do not have reliable evidence for Kabirpanth per se, but several legends, and references of Kabir and his teachings in the royal chronicles, such as *Ain-e-Akbari* avers that Kabir already had wide followings informing the royal circles from Sikandar Lodi to Akbar the Great.

## Footnotes

1. Sant Kabir Nagar district came into existence in 1997 during the Chief Ministership of Ms Mayavati, the supremo of the Bhaujan Samaj Party. Earlier it was part of district Basti. The headquarters of the Sant Kabir Nagar has been Khalilabad, which is situated at the distance of about 8 Kms. from Magahar.
2. Khadim Hussain Ansari, interviewed, Mohalla-Karam-Kabir, Village-Magahar, Sant Kabir Nagar, Uttar Pradesh, 16 Feb, 2015. Khadim Hussain is the eldest son of the erstwhile care-taker, name of the Kabir Mazar, Magahar. He along with some Muslim Kabirpanthis repeatedly exhorted that the house in which Khadim Hussain and his family has been living is actually the same place where Kabir had lived during the last phase of his life, and that his family in fact has been successive heirs of the Kabir lineage (Annexure 13).
3. *Benares Gazeetteer*, quoted in G. H. Westcott, *Kabir and Kabirpanth*, Munshiram Manoharlal, 2007(1907), p.2. To quote it, "Kabir was born at Belhara, a village in the district of Azamgarh. According to the belief of Kabirpanthis he was born in 1398 and died in 1518. The latter date is probably correct; the former is probably dictated to make him contemporaneous with Ramanand who is supposed to have lived in the fourteenth century."

4. Abul Fazl, *Ain-e-Akbari*, (trans. H.S. Jarrett), Vol.II, Asiatic Society of Bengal, Baptist Mission Press, Calcutta, 1891, pp.171-172
5. Ibid, p.129.
6. Francis Buchanan, *History, Antiquities, Topography and Statistics of Eastern India*, (ed., by M.Martin), Vol. IV, Cosmos Publication, Delhi, 1976 (1838), p. 112.
7. Abdul Haq, *Akhbar-ul-Akhyar*, Ahmadi Press, Delhi, 1853, (pp. 198-200 and 341-343), quoted in Irfan Habib (ed.), *Religion in Indian History*, Tulika Books, Delhi, 2001, p.157.
8. Mohan Singh, *Kabir: His Biography, Kabir and the Bhagti Movement*, Vol.I, Atma Ram and Sons, Lahore, 1934, p.28.
9. Irfan Habib, op.cit., 2001, p.153.
10. I have obtained these 3-page *sanad* written in Persian from Ram Avatar Das, then Mahant of the Satmalpur math, Samastipur, Bihar, during my Ph.D. He died in 2001. Two pages of the *Sanad* can also be seen in my published book (2008). (See Annexure 14,a,b).
11. I have got these pages of *sanad* translated by Dr. Y A. Zaffari, who has been one of the most famous scholars on the medieval Persian script and language. He retired as a faculty member from the Persian department of Zakir Hussain College, Delhi University and thereafter has kept himself busy in the development of the Persian language

in India from his own paternal residence lying in the old Delhi area where I had to visit four times in course of these translation works.

12. Nabhadas, *Sribhaktmal*, Tejakumar, Lucknow, 1969, p.479.
13. Description of Kabir's tours to far-flung regions of medieval Hindustan can be seen vividly described in didactic texts such as *Kabir Mansur* and *Anurag Sagar* in the form of myths and legends.
14. We have noted during our field works all the oral tradition relating to these places.
15. Padmnabh and Kamal are said to have two main immediate disciples of Kabir who carried forward their master's teaching to farther regions of present Gujarat.
16. Pt. Gangasharan Shastri has been leading a life of ousted Mahant in a math he developed after he was unceremoniously thrown out from the Kabir-Chaura by Vivek Das, the present Mahant of the Kabir Chaura, and his supporters in 2002, interviewed, Varanasi, 14 March, 2015; Vivek Das has been *de facto* Mahant of the Kabir-Chaura, Benares since 2000 and one of the most widely visiting Mahants in the Kabirpanth. The ousted Mahant Pt. Gangasharan Shastri and his admirers still contest Vivek Das's position as the *Acharya* Mahant of the Kabir-Chaura in the district court of Benares. Gangasharan

Shastri, interviewed, Benares, 17 Feb, 2015 (Annexure 15 a, b).

17. This legend has found place in most of the literary books on Kabir.
18. Find a view of the pond I had while conducting fieldwork at Fatuha in 2014, as Annexure-16 a,b. It is said that Guru Nanak had accompanied Kabir all along upto Jagannathpuri. I interviewed then Mahant Brajesh Muni, M.A., 26 June 2014. He was later removed from the seat of Mahant by the Bihar State Religious Trusts Board, Patna in April, 2015. One of the another place popular as having been the meeting points of Kabir and Guru Nanak has been Kabir Chabutra, Amarkantak, situated in the present Madhya Pradesh.
19. *Ashakubadi* is the name of the wooden shaft that Kabir is said to have used to check the expansion of the sea at Puri. It is still preserved inside the cave temple of the Kabir-Chaura campus, Jagdishpuri, Swargdwar, Jagannathpuri; Uday, PF, visited this math, 5 Oct.2013 (Annexure 17).
20. Kedarnath Dvivedi, *Kabir Aur Kabirpanth*, (Hindi), Sahitya Sammelan, Allahabad, 1965, p. 178. A few of these names are still visible on the stone slabs of the *samadhis*, however most of the inscribed names have become non-readable. Kedarnath might have been able to read as he had noted all these names about 60 years ago.



21. Abhilash Das, *Kabir Darshan*, Hindi, Parakh Prakashan, Allahabad, 2006, p. 377.
22. King Indradaman had been a legendary king of Orissa, who is also said to have built parts of the Jagannath temple in Puri. Kabirpanthis also seem to have appropriated the name of the legendary king to add veracity to their history. For details on *Indradaman*, one can consult, L.E.B. Cobden-Ramsay, *Bengal District Gazetteers, Feudatory States of Orissa*, Concept Publishing House, Delhi, 1910, pp.164-165.
23. The local *raja* of Cuttack as mentioned in the souvenir had been Prataprudra Deva, (Annexure-18).
24. My description of the Chatiya-Barharwa math is based on my field work, conducted on 15 Feb, 2015. Shukdev Singh, a Prof of Hindi, had also written a monograph in Hindi, on the history of the Bhagatahi branch, see, Shukdev Singh, *Sant Kabir Aur Bhagatahi Panth* (Hindi), Vishwavidyalaya Prakashan, Varanasi, 1998; Shobhakant Jha, *Maharishi Kabir Aur Champaran*, (Hindi), Ramrup Goswami, Bettiah, 2003.
25. Most of these Hindi scholars had taken up their study of the Bhagatahi branch under the specific persuasions of the 90 year old Mahant named Ramrup Goswami of Chatiya-Barharawa math. He is himself MA in History and Hindi. He keeps moving from Bettiah, his residence, to Chatiya Barharwa and Haridwar, where he had got built a number of maths after Bhagwan Das name. I too had to

- follow him at all these places to seek his interviews, Haridwar, Uttarakhand, 28 Feb. 2015.
26. Pithauragarh is presently part of the present Uttarakhand province.
  27. This date is quoted in most of the writings of the *Bhagatahi* branch.
  28. Shukdev Singh, op.cit., p. 49.
  29. Baghel (Vaghel) dynasty had ruled from its capital at Bandhogarh situated in the present Madhya Pradesh. After the massive attack of Akbar the Great, Baghel *raja* had to shift its capital to Rewa, about 80kms away, where the dynasty continued its rule till 1947. For details, see, Hiranand Shastri, *Baghel Dynasty of Rewa*, Archaeological Survey of India, No. 21, Govt. Of India, Calcutta, 1925, pp.1-14.
  30. Close associates and sectarian writers of the *Vansh gaddi* presently demonstrate existing Kabir temple, and the palace of Dharamdas as the clinching evidence for the visits of kabir to Bandhogarh *raja*. My project Fellow, Uday Adhau, visited Bandhogarh Fort and the neighbouring villages, 27-29 June, 2014. Bandhogarh Fort has been declared national heritage park and hence is not open for visits by commoners. It is kept open for visitors only for three days in a year by the government agency on the special occasion of the commemoration of Kabir and Dharamdas (Annexure-19). Also see Ramchander

Shukl, 'Kabir Aur Unke Sishya Dharamdas', in *Kabir Ek Punarmulyankan*, (Hindi), (Ed.) Baldev Vansi, Aadhar Prakashan, Panchkula, 2011.

31. This contentious issue of 42 generations has been the central point of the ideological differences between the Dharamdasi *vansh* branch, on the one hand and the remaining branch of the Kabirpanth, on the other hand, over the years. The non-Dharamdasi branches do not believe in this putative idea of Kabir bestowing his succession upon either to Dharamdas or to his family members.
32. The didactic texts of the Dharamdasi *Vansh gaddi*, namely, are commonly quoted to corroborate the traditional beliefs, such as *Sukrit Dhyān*, *Janmavali Dharamdas Ki*, *Amar Sukh Nidhan*, *Sakhi Granth Gurudev Ki etc*, mostly published by Damakhera headquarters of the *Vansh gaddi*.
33. For details on Kashi kingdom and the dynasties having ruled over it, one can see C.A.Bayly, *Rulers, Townsmen and Bazar: North Indian Society in the Age of Expansion 1770-1870*, Cambridge University Press, Cambridge, 1977.
34. Madhava, *Virbhanudayakavyam*, trans., (eds. K.K.Lele & A. S. Upadhyaya), Rewa Darbar, Rewa, 1938.
35. Lorenzen has discussed this legend of Puri's *Panda* in his article on 'The Life of Kabir in Legend', in Alan Entwistle

and Carol Solomon (Eds.) *Studies in the Early Indo Aryan Legend, Literature and Culture*, Manohar Publication, New Delhi, pp.209-226.

36. We can see similar wish of Guru Nanak as mentioned in *Guru Granth Sahib*; scholars like Mohan Singh however believes that this myth was originally associated with Guru Nanak.
37. Madhava, op.cit., pp.1-14.
38. *Kabir Bijak*, Venkateshwar Press, Bombay, 1906, pp. 332-333.
39. *Babur-Nama*, quoted in David N. Lorenzen, op.cit., 1992, p.15.
40. A.L.Srivastav, *The Mughal Empire*, Shivalal Aggrawal, Agra, 1964, pp. 97-98.
41. A.B. Pandey, *History of the First Afghan Empire in India*, Bookland Ltd, Delhi 1956, pp.126-27.
42. Hiranand Shastri, *The Baghel Dynasty of Rewa*, Archaeological Survey of India, No.21, Govt. Of India, Calcutta, 1925, p. 12.
43. S. A. A. Rizvi, *A History of Sufism in India*, 2 Vols., Munshiram Manoharlal, Delhi, 1978 (1975), pp. 487-91.
44. *Kabir Bijak*, op.cit., pp. 672-77.
45. Ibid, pp. 677-80.

46. David N. Lorenzen, 'The Kabirpanth: Heretics to Hindus' in Lorenzen (ed.), *Religious Change and Cultural Domination*, El Colegio de Maxico, Maxico, 1981, p.277.
47. R.V. Russell and Hiralal, op.cit. 1969, vol. 4, Anthropological Publishers, pp. 434-35.
48. Gangasharan Shastri, *Kabir Jivancharitra*, Kabirvani Prakashan, Varanasi, 1976, pp.153-57.
49. David N. Lorenzen, op.cit., 1992, pp.29-32
50. Mohan Singh, op.cit, p. 101.
51. Charlotte Vaudeville, *Kabir*, Vol.I, Clarendon Press, 1974, p.333; and Sadhusaran Gosvami, *Kabir Bijak ki Tikaon ka Alochanatamak Adhyayan* in Vivek Das (ed.), *Kabir Sahab*, Kabirvani Prakashan Kendra, Varanasi, 1978, pp.255-70.
52. Dharendra Varma, *Hindi Sahitya Kosh*, Vol.I, Janmandal Limited, Varanasi, 1986, p.575.
53. Traditionally it is said that the entire capital town of Bandhogarh was brought within the four walls of the fort in order to ensure security both of the *raja* and the townsmen. Dharmmdas's own splendid house (*haveli*) among many others of the eminent persons thus came to form part of this fortified *Qasba*.
54. K.K. Bhatt, *Kabir Parampara (Gujarat Ke Sandharva mein)*, (Hindi), Abhinav Bharti, Allahabad, 1975, p. 29.
55. R.V. Russel & Hiralal, op.cit., pp.537-40.
56. Quoted in K.K.Bhatt, op.cit., p. 75

57. Gangasharan Shastri, op.cit., pp. 122-24
58. David N Lorenzen, op.cit., 1992. The first section of this book describes and interprets the possible meanings of the legends textually and orally known about Kabir.
59. David N Lorenzen, op.cit., 1992, p.33
60. Ibid, section 2, p. 54
61. Parmanand, *Kabir Mansur*, trans. by Sudhadas, Motidasji Chetandasji, Baroda, 1956, pp.166-67
62. Brahmalinmuni, op.cit., pp.481-96.
63. Lorenzen, op.cit., 1992, p.50
64. Muhsin Fani, *The Dabistan or School of Manners*, trans. by D. Shea and A. Troyer, vol.2, Paris, 1843, pp. 189-91.
65. Mahipati, *Bhaktivijay*, Vol.I, Motilal Banarasidas, Delhi,1982(1933)
66. Lorenzen, op.cit.,1992, p.68
67. *Kabir Mansur*, op.cit., pp.155-56
68. Mahipati,op.cit., pp. 98-108
69. Lorenzen, op.cit., 1991, p. 75
70. I have already mentioned names of places where both the medieval *sants* are traditionally said to have stayed together.
71. *Baghelvanshvarnan*,op.cit.,1906, p. 17.
72. Anantdas, op.cit., p. 15

73. Charlotte Vaudeville, op.cit., p.46
74. David N Lorenezen, *Bhakti Religion in North India:Community Identity and Political Action*, State University of New York Press, Albany,1995, pp.181-211
75. David N Lorenzen, op.cit., 1992. p.13
76. Rajendra Prasad, *Kabirpanth Ka Udbahv Avam Prasar*, pp.36-37
77. Parashuram Chaturvedi, op.cit.,p. 212
78. Mukund cited in K.K.Bhatt, op.cit., p. 68
79. ibid, p. 74
80. I have quoted these lines from the Bhai Bala's *Janam Sakhi*, lithographed, as preserved by a *Kabirpanthi Sikh*, Harnam Singh Hera, Mohali, p. 263; *Janam sakhis* have been a primary source for reconstructing Guru Nanak's life and formative phase of the Sikh history in most of the scholarly works. For most judicious usage of *janam sakhis* by a scholar, see, W.H.McLEOD, *Guru Nanak and the Sikh Religion*, OUP, Delhi, 1986, pp. 21-24. (Annexure-20 a,b,c,d,e).
81. Mohan Singh, op.cit., p. 88
82. The most prominent Kabirpanthi family in Chandigarh to whom I often sought supports in research frequently has been that of Sri Sadanand, 83, who is a retired IAS of 1963 batch. His family has inherited Kabirpanth three generation ago. I first heard of such tradition prevalent

among Kabirpanthis in his family while I was conducting field work in this region. I have had rounds of discussions with him and his three brothers living in Chandigarh (annexure-21).

83. This fact was first brought to my notice by Harnam Singh Hera, who has tried to discuss this issue through his writings; see Harnam Singh Hera, interviewed, 11 May, 2013 and several other disciples reconfirmed his views. He often quotes the following Sakhi of the Guru Granth Sahib to demonstrate the striking closeness between the two as attached in the annexures.
84. Parmanand, *Kabir Mansur*, Lakshmi Venkateshwar Press, Bombay, 1942 (1880), p. 5.
85. I conducted fieldwork in Cuttack for two days in between 28-29 Dec 2014. It is situated at Chauliaganj area. However we cannot say for sure that the *samadhi* math had developed over the Jagodasi Kabir math. Uday had also visited Cuttack and surrounding areas in search of this math, but he had returned dissatisfiedly.
86. I had myself visited Adharatharhi math, interviewed Mahant and a non-kabirpanthi Brahmin septagenerian, 12 June 2014.
87. Out of 21, 17 *samadhis* are inside the hall, and 4 *samadhis* are still visible, although dimly, in an open land plot of the math.



88. Some of the scholars who have studied Kabirpanth have found Surati Gopal's position as the first Mahant of the Kabir-Chaura doubtful, as has been shown in all the literatures published by the math authorities in particular and those of its supportive branches, such as, the Bhagatahi and Jagodasi branches. G.H Westcott appears to be the first scholar who had found credulous his first position in the genealogy of Mahants at the Kabir-Chaura, Benares; see G.H Westcott, reprint, 2007, p.67 see (Annexure-7).
89. The legendary birth of Kabir inside a pond is said to be a ruse of the Hindu *Kabirpanthi pandits* just to debunk his Muslim parentage as the Muslim Kabirpanthis of Magahar pointed out to me. Nonetheless, scholars too have been divided over Kabir's parental religion and the issue is still open to further research. The pond popular as the Lahartara is presently under the control of the *Nad Vanshi Kharasiya math*, Chhattisgarh since 1934. However, for all practical puposes, the *Acharyas* of this branch have developed this centre as the headquarters of the branch at Varanasi, as its official headquarters at Kharasiya lies in a rural area. Lahartara math, Benares, visited by me, 14March, 2015 (Annexure-22, 23).
90. I describe the Pushkar Kabir math on the field data collected by my first Project Fellow, Rajendar Singh Soni, 3 June 2013 unless otherwise stated.

91. The IGNCA, New Delhi had conducted this project in 1997.
92. The details of this math are based on the field work and observations of my first PF Rajendar Singh, visited, June, 2013.
93. For the history of Marwar, I have checked Jan Lingen, *Marwar Jodhpur State History and Coinage*, IIRNS, 2012
94. Akbar's story seems plausible in the light of the grant one of its sub-branch said to have received from him, otherwise the present or the past authorities of the Kabir-Chaura have never shown an evidence to corroborate their claim till date. It has been my study of the *panth* which for the first time discovered the *sanad* which mentions Akbar's name.
95. Kabir Chaura, Varanasi, has published an article of Krishna Kalki in its Souvenir, *Siddhpeeth* Kabir-Chaura, Hindi, Kabirvani Prakashan, Varanasi, 2007, pp.87-102 which states these facts. But on my query about sources of these information, the author has just oral tradition in reply (Annexure-24).
96. The Sikh history does corroborate the fact that the present Amritsar was founded on the land it got as a grant from Akbar, but its link with the Kabir-Chaura is no- where hinted. See details on Akbar's grant facilitating the foundation of Amritsar in W.H.McLEOD, *Essays in Sikh History, Tradition and Society*, OUP, New Delhi, 2007.

97. Krishna Kalki, *Yahin Se Footi thi Azadi Ki Pahali Chingari*, Hindi, op.cit., p.92
98. Lal Sahib is shown as the second Mahant of the Kabir-Chaura after Kabir's death by G.H. Westcott, op cit., p. 67.
99. I have described above the *Sanads* which I had collected during field work, have shown these as a clinching evidence for the antiquity of the existing Satmalpur math, Samastipur, Bihar.
100. F.E. Keay, *Kabir and His Followers*, Association Press, Calcutta, 1931., p. 24
101. F.E. Keay, op. cit., p. 56

## Kabirpanth in the Seventeenth Century

Oral and circumstantial evidences suggest that Kabir's messages were being given a formal shape in the form of devotional centres in several parts of the Mughal India after his death throughout the sixteenth century. While most of the earlier centres continued to be active, many others also came into existence during the succeeding centuries. In this period, while the numbers of maths appear to have increased, the area of the influence of Kabir's teaching too expanded geographically.

We can discern the process of expansion unfolding in the successive Mahants who took over the *gaddi* at the already existing maths. These centres which were opened to carry forward Kabir's messages had already drawn into their fold some affluent members in their vicinity. In turn, the affluent members had begun to show their generosity and bequeathed some of these earliest centres with landed donations. Consequently the need of a regular manager, if not a Mahant, apart from a religious instructor (*guru*), may have been felt at these centres, to effectively use and maintain the resources being granted to them in the best possible manner. The adoption and continuous tradition of having a Mahant at a math may be then ascribed to the exigencies of the management of accumulating landed property-rather than a religious necessity.

The earliest centres of devotion emerging as the Kabir-Chaura math in Benaras and Jagannathpuri, Bhagatahi maths at Chatiya-Baraharwa in west Champaran district, *Kabir Vad* in Gujarat, *Dharmadasi* centres base from Bandhogarh to Ratanpur and to Koogharmal (Kugharmal) in then Central Indian regions, seem to have widened their sphere of influence during the seventeenth century.

### **Churamani Samadhi at Koodurmal**

#### **Inner view of the Churamani Samadhi**

Oral tradition of the earliest maths formed at Chatiya, as mentioned above, in the western Champaran district of Bihar got an extension centre of the Bhagatahi branch towards the end of the sixteenth century. Prevailing tradition in the Champaran region apprises us of the expanding trend of the Chatiya math. Shukdev Singh's research work<sup>1</sup> on the Bhagatahi branch of the Kabirpanth, conducted during 1970s leads us to believe that till the death of the Ghanshyam Goswami, the successor of Bhagwan Goswami, Pithodabad/Pithodagarh math in Uttarakhand had remained in existence along with the Chatiya math. By the time Ghanshyam Goswami expired, another math had come into existence at Belsand in the present Sitamarhi district of Bihar. The first Mahant who was deputed there was Uddhoran Goswami, an eminent disciple of Ghanshyam Goswami. Uddhoran being the ablest among all his followers, in his *guru's* estimate, was also declared the Mahant of the Chatiya math. It is said that the centre came to win favour of a local *raja*

during the early years of its formation, providing it an edge over many other centres then being opened in the north Bihar.

The *guru-pranali*,<sup>2</sup> as preserved by the *Bhagatahi Achariya Gaddi* and accepted by most of its sub-branches, shows that by the turn of the seventeenth century, the first Kabir center had shifted from Chatiya to Baraharwa, situated at the distance of 2 kilometers (approx). During the time of Ghanshyam Goswsami, another math which was formed at Belsand in the present district of Sitamarhi, Bihar, became a sister branch of the Chatiya- Barharawa. The Belsand center, however, could not survive for long. It is said that Ghanshyam Goswami and Uddhoran Goswami had opened this centre on the bank of river Gandak during one of their tours towards Nepal region. He deputed one of his disciples named Uddhoran Goswami to conduct the religious affairs at this centre. Until his death, Uddhoran controlled both Belsand and Chatiya-Barharwa maths. Dewan Goswami succeeded Uddhoran, being the closest and the senior most among all his disciples, he was also given charge of both the centres. Towards the end of the seventeenth century, a local *raja* is said to have generously donated the Chatiya-Barharawa math. It is said that Bhagwan Goswami could thus cover an area of 320 *bighas*, which were then handed over to him by a *dan-patra*, presently in the possession of Ramrup Goswami, which however he could not make available to me. In the mean while, another resourceful centre emerged at Vairatpur in the Tirhut paragana of present Bihar under then ruler of Darbhanga raj.<sup>3</sup> Another centre had also come into existence at village Laheji in present Chhapara district.

Uddhoran is said to have been an inhabitant of Vairatpur in then Mithila region of north-east Bihar. He had turned to Kabir during

the time of Bhagwan Goswami itself and was famous as a singer of Vidyapati's compositions. Before turning to Kabir's *nirgun panth*, he is said to have been a Krishna *bhakta*. Being a local *bhakta* of Vairatpur, it was Uddhoran who was given the charge of a small *ashram* then being opened under the influence of Ghanshyam Goswami. As a famous *bhajan* singer, he could quickly pick up the metres of *nirgun sakhis* of Kabir after joining the new path of Kabir, and thus succeeded in popularizing the latter among the general public of the region. His popularity became so widespread that he was first chosen to head the *Khemsar ashram* of Ghanshyam Goswami. In a short period, Uddhoran also emerged as an erudite *sant* among the band of *sadhus* coming under the umbrella organization centred at Chatiya-Barharawa. Finally he was deputed as the head of all the sub-branches then operational under Chatiya-Barharawa math. During his tenure as the heads of *ashrams* related to Chatiya-Barharawa, he drew a sizeable number of followers in his fold, but the three most prominent among them were said to have been Ganesh Goswami, Davan Gosain, and Anu Goswami. Davan Gosain, being the senior most among these three succeeded Uddhoran after latter's death at the *gaddi* of the chief math of Chatiya-Barharawa. He also continued to directly supervise the affairs of the Khemsar ashram too. It appears that the present Bhagatahi branch of the *panth* had not found its present Dhanauti math till the beginning of the eighteenth century. Instead, its main sub branches were situated at Belsand, Khemsar, Vairatpur and Siswa. All these centres had one commonality that these all had come to be formed under the influence of the headship of the Mahant of Chatiya-Barharawa math.

Kabir's centre of devotion having developed around his tomb at Jagannathpuri, Orissa could not escape the discerning eyes of Tavernier too, a French scholarly traveller of the late seventeenth century. He clearly notes in his travelogue that 'Near the pagoda, the tomb of one of their prophets, named Cabir, to whom they do great honour, is to be seen.'<sup>4</sup> This recorded observation makes it clear that the number of admirers if not followers of Kabir in that part of India was sizeable enough and that Kabir himself had spent some time at Puri. Legendary events associated with Kabir at Puri here find some elements of reality, at least in terms of quality. Tavernier does not provide us any more information about Kabirpanth in his account, but traditionally, it is said that the centre founded by Jagodas in Cuttack continued and kept flourishing at least materially well beyond this century till early eighteenth century. We shall have occasion to describe the compelling circumstances that finally drove the Kabirpanth establishment to close its Cuttack centre abruptly. However the centre at Puri, as observed by Tavernier, has continued its operation till date under the name of Kabir-Chaura, Jagdishpuri, Puri, Orissa.

Some informants have got to narrate the Kabir-Chaura's trials and tribulations relating to Jahangir, Akbar's successor to the Mughal empire. It is said that a group of 4 *sadhus* under the leadership of Hausil Das, the six Mahant of math, had met Jahangir in his court in Agra, just to forewarn him against the impending danger associated with the *farman* he had granted to the European traders with special privileges. Jahangir, it is said, was theoretically convinced by the views of the saintly delegates and tended to withdraw the '*farman*' but for the ill-advice of Noorjahan, who checked him from ordering the *farman*'s



withdrawal. Upon returning Kabir Chaura frustrated, these *sadhus*, perforce, had to issue direction to all their followings against use of the foreign goods, and boycott the usage of foreign goods thus reaching urban centres of the Mughal India including Kashi.

Krishna Kalki,<sup>5</sup> a scholar, has mentioned in his article that the revolt of the *Satnamis* under the banner of guru Ramdas of the Marathas had tacit support of the Kabir-Chaura establishment during 1676. Guru Ramdas had been in regular contact with the Mahants of the Kabir-Chaura in order to keep away Aurangzeb from nourishing an evil design against it. Nonetheless, the math is said to have been an active instigator of the *Satnami* rebellion during the reign of Aurangzeb itself.

Aurangzeb on the other hand is also said to have extended material support to the Kabir Mazar then existing at Magahar. A *Persian* text presently in the possession of Sunni Waqf Board, Lucknow certifies clearly that the *Mazar* was bestowed with 250 *bighas* of rent free land as *madad-e-maas* by Alamgir (1658-1707). David N. Lorenzen had also occasion to have a look of these texts, but as he has mentioned in his book, he could not get copy of these texts. To quote directly from his book -

The Muslim caretaker of the tomb [at Magahar] did tell me that several land grants relative to the tomb at Magahar were preserved in the Sunni Vaqf Board in Lucknow. My then assistant, Mr Anand Ghildayal, was able to examine the documents and make a summary of their contents. The oldest is a Mughal grant from the reign of Alamgir

(Aurangzeb). It bears the date 1110 hijri (A.D. 1698-1699). The grant registers the gift of the village Kabirapur Karmua for the upkeep of the Muslim tomb of Shah Kabir. Three later grants have to do with law suits between various persons and the managers of the lands and the tomb. The managers claim to be descendants of Kabir.<sup>6</sup>

I however succeeded in getting hold of these Persian *Parvanas*. Its opening page begins with certification that the land in dispute has actually been granted as a *madad-e-mas* from the crown property to Sheikh Jalaluddin, the care-taker of the *dargah* of Kabir Shah in 1107 AH(1696). But the caretaker of the *Mazar/ dargah*, who were direct descendents of Shah Kabir *jiv*, as the documents certify, had sought intervention of royal officials in 1215 AH (1801) against the grabbing of these lands by a Qazi named Sadiullah of Rampur, and Ram Singh, a zamindar of Bansi *pargana*,<sup>7</sup> situated at the distance of about 45 kms from Magahar. Sadiullah is however reported to have died before the order was being passed. The *parvana* thus was issued to the Qazi Ahmad Khan of *pargana* Magahar to restore the possession of the *dargah* situated at Kabirpur-Karmua in the Mauzamabad (medieval name of Gorakhpur) to the original family of the caretaker (*sevak*), named Sheikh Jalaluddin. The name of the successor *sevak* was Ghulam Kabir as mentioned in the *parvana in 1686*. In fact the document also brings into focus the names of the descendents of Kabir's lineage. Shah Jalaluddin, was the son of Sheikh Hamid, who was grandson of Kabir. The year when Aurangzeb had granted these lands, Sheikh Jalauddin was the

caretaker of the *dargah* in 1696. The *Parvana* presumably was issued in the trail of the infighting between ardent Hindu and Muslim followers of Kabir that led to the bifurcation of the *Mazar* into Kabir Mazar and the Kabir *Samadhi* in late eighteenth century, which we describe in next chapter.

These *Persian* documents acquire specific importance as no where we have such details about the pedigree of Kabir. Yet before the pedigree becomes acceptable to us, we shall have to finally acquiesce to the fact that Kabir must have longer association with a Muslim family either by birth or by his upbringing.<sup>8</sup> Md. Khadim Hussain Ansari, the present care-taker of the *Mazar* recalls that the Bansi *raja* used to provide *chadhauna* every year to the Kabir Mazar all through well until the 1980s. Apart from the Bansi *raja*, the royal family of Unawal, too used to provide *Chadhauna* annually. Unawal is situated at the distance of 20kms from the *Mazar*. But both the royal families have presently stopped the support.

It also becomes clear from these documents, we must note in the passing, that there was no mention of the existence of a Kabir *Samadhi*<sup>9</sup> during Aurangzeb's time or a century later when the dispute over the land had erupted, necessitating the *parvana* to be issued in 1794(1215 AH). The ensuing strifes among Hindu and Muslim followers of Kabir had resulted in the opening of a Kabir *Samadhi* in the same complex of the Kabir Mazar, as hinted by Francis Buchanan, who had begun his ethnography study of the region in the early nineteenth century, as an event having taken place 'recently' in his report of British Gorakhpur district. However, it appears till 1830s, no permanent structure of the *Samadhi* had developed in the complex as it is no where visible in the map drawn in 1832. (see Annexure- 30 a,b,c)

Scholarly works and prevailing tradition in the present Madhya Pradesh and Chhattisgarh make it clear that the centre initiated in Bandhogarh by Dharamdas had been undergoing further divisions during this period. The reasons leading to the repeated splits were mostly related to the issues of the succession to the *gaddi* of Mahant as well as the marital character of the Mahant. Some followers who did not find Kabir's teachings supporting the control of a hereditary head of religious centre then developing in his name, as followed by Churamani and his successors, finally gathered courage to register their dissent to the office bearers of the Dharamdasi centre. Dissenting voices had thus been getting strong within this emerging branch, exacerbated by the external forces opposed to the heterodoxy of Kabir himself. In the circumstance, the headquarters of the emerging Dharamdas branch itself was shifting its place from one to other. Moreover, the centres run by householders under the leadership of successive heads of Narayan Das, the elder son of Dharamdas too came under strains as its successors too had to shift its base from Bandhogarh to other places.

The earliest split thus seen in the Churamani-led centre occurred during the early seventeenth century. The first split resulted in the formation of a Kabir centre at Hatkeshar in the present Madhya Pradesh. This math was founded by the eldest wife of Churamani (Muktamani) after she had separated from him due to persistent neglect of her wish to declare her son as the immediate successor of Churamani. She is actually said to have given birth to Churamani's son later than that of his younger wife. However, her desire to see her own son as the *Acharya* of the Dharmdasi *gaddi*, which was getting settled at Ratanpur strongly, had not died down. She kept insisting that her son who was just

2 days younger than Sudarshan, the son of the Mukhtamani's second wife. Mukhtamani, however could not fulfil the wish of his first wife. It is further said that she also realized that it was in fact humiliation to her as well. Frustrated, the first wife deserted and left her husband and his family for unknown places for ever.

While she had been travelling further towards western India, she is said to have met some devotees near Dhamtari, where, on persistent request, she agreed to stay along with her son, named Suta Das. F.E. Keay<sup>10</sup> had found a *guru-pranali* of the Hatkesar math during the early 20<sup>th</sup> century in which he had found the list of 10 Mahants having served this math by that time.

The oral tradition relating to the Hatkesar math is partly, supported by the number of the *Samadhi* still preserved there. However, the *Samadhi* of Yudhisthir Das, Amrit Das, Janadas , and Kirpal Das are preserved at Rudri, whereas Mahant Faqir Das is said to have died somewhere on his tours, but his *Samadhi* was erected in Nagpur.<sup>11</sup> Hatkesar math still has the *Samadhi* of Kumar Das and Dada Sahib.

### Hatkesar math

The original centre at *Bandhogarh* opened by Dharamdas is said to have continued there almost for a century. Traditionally, this period is expressed in terms of three generations of Narayan Das, who kept alive Kabir's teachings in the Baghelkhand region. It is estimated that by 1720s, the *Bandhogarh* centre was closed as the political turmoils, following the split of the *Bandhogarh* kingdom at Rewa due to the rebel of a prince, had intensified, and the rebellious prince gradually established himself in the *zamindari* centre at a *qasba* called Sohawal<sup>12</sup> in the present

Satna district during the seventeenth century. It is said then Mahant of the *Narayandasi* branch had tacit support to the rebellious prince and hence he also shifted his Kabir centre to Suhawal. Soon Suhawal being the new centre of Suhawal state emerged as one of the important towns under its protectorate. The *Narayandasi* successors also enjoyed the Baghel patronage, and hence decided to operate from there alone. One of the successor Mahants at Suhawal is recalled as Parman Das, fifth in the genealogy of *Narayandasi Acharyas*.<sup>13</sup>

Parman Das appears to be the most prominent *Narayandasi* Mahant both in terms of scholarship and his contribution to the expansion of the *Narayandasi* branch of Dharamdas. It was however he finally shifted his centre of devotion to Uchehara where its present headquarters continues. Uchehara is situated in the same district of Satna. He is said to have written or compiled a number of religious scriptures relating to Kabir during this century. Some of these works date back to 1686 (1743VS), such as *Nikasi*, *Ramanad-Kabir* and *Jam-Charit*.<sup>14</sup> In addition to these texts, his period also saw wide expansion of the *Narayandasi* branch at several places in Panna district, such as Puraina, Mahoba, and Mohadra. In Satna district alone, its sub-branches grew at Jaso, Sitpura, while earlier centre at Suhawal remained active for the next few generations, after his death at Uchehara. His *Samadhi* was erected on the bank of a river flowing by the side of Uchehara, which is still maintained and preserved by the Uchehara management of the math.

## Gujrat

Roughly around the same period, another centre of Kabirpanth is said to have come into existence in Surat, Gujarat. According

to the prevailing tradition, the present math situated at Sangrampura in Surat was erected in 1607 (VS 1666) after the local Muslim ruler donated the entire garden of Rustampura to the Kabirpanth *sadhu*.<sup>15</sup> The legend prevailing in this area tells us that the *sadhu* accompanied by a couple of his fellow travellers were taking rest inside the royal garden by spreading their own *chadar* on the semi-grassy ground, unaware of the timings of the visitors in the garden. But it was the time of Muslim *sultan's* routine visit there. The royal security therefore came down to the garden to tighten security measures for *sultan's* visit, but the *sadhus* showed reluctance to leave the garden. The security then applied force to take them out, but to no avail, as the security personnel could not remove the *chadar* on which the *sadhus* had been taking rest. Although the royal security could not believe their eyes, the *sadhus* on their own vacated the garden just by forewarning them not to disturb the *sadhus* in future.

The incredible event of their inability to lift up the spread *chadar* from the ground, got leaked to the *sultan* also, who, too, did not believe initially. He is said to have ordered their musclemen to bring before him the miraculous *sadhus*, as the *sultan* himself was then looking for such persons who could cure him of some chronic disease. The *sultan* orders were complied, and the *sadhus* were brought in the *sultan's* court. Upon reaching the court, the *sultan* treated them with all respect and apologised to them for the indiscreet behaviour his watchmen of the garden had meted out to them. In addition, the *sultan* is said to have asked them in what other ways he could serve them. The *sadhus* are said to have asked nothing for their own comfort, but for the benevolent and generous treatment for the common Hindu populace of Surat and of the temples then existing in the region.

The *sultan* readily promised for fair treatment to the *sadhus* wishes, but soon sought advice of the *sadhus* to get himself cured of the chronic ailment. The *sadhus* then suggested remedy to the *sultan's* disease and the remedy gradually cured him. After finding these *sadhus* imbued with healing power too, the *sultan* decided to donate the entire Rustampur garden to the *sadhus* who were once humiliated there. The present math's building is said to have been standing inside the same garden and called Kabir Mandir, Rustampura (Sangrampura) in Surat.

The math is said to have been founded by the leading member among the *sadhus* named Mohan Das,<sup>16</sup> who was in all probability a non-Gujarati. Mohan Das is remembered as a fabulous *bhajan* singer of Kabir, and local people would flock to hear his *bhajan* in large numbers. It is also said that his singing was rooted in strong conviction, compelling many listeners to follow Mohan Das. The increasing admirers of Mohan Das is said to have forced him to stay at Sangrampura area where they all arranged for him a separate accommodation which was to develop as a centre of devotion of the Kabirpanth. However, the growth of the centre was soon halted by the hostile attitude of some fanatic Muslims who are said to have registered their protest with the then local Muslim ruler against Mohan Das and his emerging centre.

The then Muslim ruler is said to have ordered Mohan Das to vacate the centre as the Kabir's centre was too close to the mosque being threatened by the teachings of Kabir, as propagated by Mohan Das. However, the eviction order was withdrawn by the same ruler immediately after Mohan Das was found to be a miraculous saint. In fact, Mohan Das came to the rescue of the ruler when one of the ailing members of royal



family could regain his life following medical treatment and blessing from Mohan Das alone. The *raja* then decided to rehabilitate Mohan Das by offering him all the facilities he had then required for furthering the cause of Kabir in the locality. It is still one of the most affluent Kabir *ashram* in Gujarat presently affiliated to the splinter group of *Kharasiya* branch of the *Dharmdasi* branch. However, the landed property of the math exists largely in and around villages named Gantsewar, Kamrej and Pimba of the Surat district. The Kabir Mandir, Sangrampur has a sub-branch near Ayodhya in the Faizabad district of Uttar Pradesh.<sup>17</sup>

As its affiliation with the *Kharasiya* section makes it clear the math has been following the practice of deputing *virakta* Mahant at the seat of this math, specifically from those disciples who had acquired required knowledge of running a centre of Kabir, while residing at the math itself.

The oldness of the Sangrampur math is also supported by the long list of 22 Mahants who have had succeeded this math till date. The present Mahant of the Sangrampur math, Devendra Das zealously comes forward to show the genealogy of the Mahants of the math presently called Kabir Mandir as inscribed in Gujarati on its *Satsang* hall, which also mentions the above year of its foundation as well. Devendra Das has been heading the math since 2002.<sup>18</sup> The math also has preserved the *Samadhi* of its Mahants, but its number is just 12. According to the present Mahant, the *Samadhi* of the remaining Mahants could not be preserved along with these 12 because most of them expired while they were on their sojourns. We can see the inscribed genealogy (see the genealogy attached in annexure-5).

## Emergence of a caste-cluster as Kabirpanthis:

### **Panikas in the Central Provinces**

Oral tradition has it that in the Chhattisgarh region, the first group of Kabirpanth was formed in a *qasba* named Manikpur. It is said that the group had five (*Panch*) members and they turned to Kabirpanth under the influence either of Chhuramani Das or of Narayan Das, the sons of Dharmadas. These followers are said to have followed Kabir's teaching so firmly that they became famous there for their unflinching resolution on the path of spiritualism, and thus got the title of *prandhari* (strict adherents of religious vows) in the Manikpur area.<sup>19</sup> Hence they became popular as the *Manikpuri Panikas* distinct from those of other regions in the Central India.

### Ram Kabir- Panth

Ram Kabirpanthis have been another large group of Kabir disciples who belong to a particular caste of the present Gujarat. Our field-studies in parts of Gujarat suggest that their ancestors too had been migrants from the northern India. To some, their ancestors presumably had migrated from some parts of Uttar Pradesh; to some other groups, their ancestors originally lived in the medieval Punjab.<sup>20</sup> There is all probability that two streams of Kabirpanthis-Kurmish and Bhagats, the former from eastern India; and another from the medieval Punjab, over two different periods of time, may have migrated towards parts of Gujarat. The varying regions of their settlements get reflected in their religious practices too, although they have all been Kabir's disciples called '*Ram Kabirs*', but by two different names.

According to Parshuram Chaturvedi, it was a Kabir's disciple named Padmnabh, who had initiated Ram-Kabir in parts of Gujarat. Padmnabh's discipleship of Kabir is also mentioned in the '*Bhaktmal*' of Nabhadas.<sup>21</sup>

Ram-Kabirpanthis of the eastern part of Gujarat is also called *Udapanthi*. These *Udapanthis* emerged as a distinct group among the Ram-Kabirpanthis of the region. Our informants apprise that the spiritual orientation of these followers required them to create their own *rites de passage*. They took all measures to abstain from intoxicants such as tobacco, wine, and smoking. To ensure complete abstinence from these intoxicants, they would place a rosary of Kabir around their children's neck during their infancy itself. By not accepting the meals from the hands of a non-vegetarian, however they seem to have sought higher social status in their society. It is said that they used to keep a separate bowl for feeding the non-vegetarians if wanted by the latter in exigencies.

To Keep their sacred status intact, infinitely, they also developed sanctioning marital ties with their *Udapanthi* families alone. It helped them in abolishing dowry system from the roots in the marriages of the *Udapanthis* with an added advantage of providing a socially and culturally viable milieu for spiritual growth of their descendents. As a result, marriages of their members would often take place within the same village or the *qasba*.

Apart from marriage, they have developed a unique type of death ceremony. They burn the dead body to ashes. On that day, each family of the Udas prepare *khichadi* in the village. All these members then partake of the *khichadi* throughout the day by visiting each of their houses one after the other. For the next 30

days of the death, they distribute *prasad* among themselves after performing evening ritual of the funeral ‘bhajans’ by themselves. The *prasad* to be distributed is prepared turn-wise in each house of the Udas. Thus the death ceremony comes to an end in 30 days. Following the process, it is ensured that the family braving death does not have to bear extra financial or social obligation; it is hereby shared by each member of the Udas families living in the village.

During the long protracted history of *Udapanthi* in Gujarat they are said to have divided into two main branches- spread over two different regions of Kanam and Surat. The divide has got so widened that they hardly establish marital relation with each other.

Indicated by the existence of a few Ram Kabir maths in and around Ayodhya, in the present Uttar Pradesh, the functionaries of the Ram Kabir math situated in Ayodhya trace Ram-Kabir’s initiation to Ramyash.<sup>22</sup> Ramyash is said to have been a Brahmin Kabirpanthi sant from this region, who was rechristened as Ram-Kabir, either by Ramanand or Kabir himself.

To many *Udapanthis*, Ram-Kabir was initiated by Gyaniji, another Kabir’s disciples from Gujarat. As has been described above, Raghavdas or Raghudas in his *Bhaktmal*<sup>23</sup> mentions Gyaniji as one of Kabir’s contemporary disciples from Gujarat. *Udapanth* thus originated from the Ram-Kabir as a distinct group during the life-time of Jeevan ji, who, in turn, had been an eminent disciple of Gopal Das. Gopal Das is said to have been an immediate follower of Gyaniji himself. Presently the main *Gaddi* of Jeevan ji has been situated at Puniyad near Baroda in Gujarat. According to the prevailing tradition, a group of Ram- Kabirpanthis have also been known as *Udhapanthis*, almost all of them living in

Gujarat alone, except those who have emigrated and have been living abroad.<sup>24</sup>

Westward growth of the Kabirpanth seems to have remained unabated during the seventeenth century as well. There are, at least, two maths, which claim to have their origin during this century. One of these is located in Pune and the other in Aurangabad of the present state of Maharashtra. Both these centres are presently located in the middle of the cities, indicating the fact that these centres must have witness to the growth of the cities over centuries. However, the character of the Kabir math in Maharashtra and Gujarat are deliberately changed, and in the process, almost all Kabir maths have begun to add the idols of some Hindu pantheon, along with the idol of Kabir in the same temple complex.

*Kabir ashram* of Pune<sup>25</sup> appears to be the oldest among all the *Kabir* maths in Maharashtra. Although the present lady Mahant, Sudhaben does not want to show any written records relating to this math to anyone for fear of the ongoing revenue suits against this math, oral tradition avers that one Jangali baba had been the founder of this ashram. While interviewing Jagdish Das, the then Mahant of *Pune Ashram* during 1960s, Kedarnath Dvivedi<sup>26</sup> has noted that Jangali baba's original name was Yograj Sahib, and till then 20 Mahants had succeeded the seat of this math. Jagdish Das expired in 2005 and since then his wife Sudha has been heading the math till date. The present Mahant shared all these information with us also but she does not remember the names of the preceding Mahants except her husband. In the circumstances, we are constrained to use the list of Mahants's name as enumerated by Kedarnath Dvivedi. Sudhaben did not concede to show the *Samadhi* hall wherein these are preserved.

The *Samadhi* hall is, as we were informed, situated at a distance of ½ km from the math and the extended area around the *Samadhi* has been encroached by some persons who have their living houses in the vicinity, leading to revenue suits and counter suits from both the sides.

Jangali Baba has, however, been a legendary figure in the popular memory in the region. It is said he had once overpowered a lion, as the lion had killed one of his sleeping oxen during night-time, and then yoked the captured lion to his bullock cart to complete the remaining distance to Kudoormal the headquarter of the Dharmdasi branch situated in present Madhya Pradesh. The legend relates this event to the life time of Amol Nam Sahib, the seventh *Acharya* of the this branch during the early years of the eighteenth century. It is further said that it was this very incredible act of bravery of Yograj that earned him the name of Jangali baba, initially given to him by Amol Nam himself. Yograj, however, could not survive long after this event and finally he decided to go for a *jivit* (conscious) *Samadhi* in Pune, where his *Samadhi* is still preserved.

Another seventeenth century centre of Kabir is situated in Aurangabad,<sup>27</sup> another old city of Maharashtra. According to the prevailing tradition, the first batch of Kabirpanth followers appeared in Aurangabad during the reign of Aurangzeb, particularly in the trail of his decision to reconstruct the *Bibi's* tomb in Aurangabad completed in 1692. This first batch of followers in this town came here from present Uttar Pradesh, among many others, as masons and helpers in building the tomb. Most of them, however could not succeed in returning their homeland, and hence got settled there forever. Shanti Das, the present Mahant of the math still preserves a document of mid-

18<sup>th</sup> century, written in Marathi,<sup>28</sup> which is addressed to Santosh Das, the then Mahant of this Aurangabad math. Presently the Aurangabad math's landed properties are spread in surrounding villages of Nagaori, Sawangi and Ashrampur. All these three villages are presently having Kabir Mandirs being run by the management of the Aurangabad math.

Most interestingly the Aurangabad Kabir math also houses a statue of Sain Baba with the twin objectives of adding to the resources of the Kabir math as well as introducing the non-Kabirpanth devotees to the doctrines of Kabir, as explained by the present Mahant.

### Rajputana

Neeti M Sadarangani<sup>29</sup> is of the view that Dadu had been the main disciple of Kabir who carried his messages right from Ahmedabad, his birth place, to *Rajasthan* at the turn of the seventeenth century. According to her, Ahmedabad had been Dadu's birth-place, but he had shifted to Naraina near Sambhur and Jaipur in *Rajasthan* and once settled there, he kept on disseminating Kabir's preachings till his death in 1603. He is said to have been initiated into Kabirpanth by Vridhanand or Vrihyanand. Dadu Dayal himself has accepted Kabir as his actual *guru* as evident in a couplet of his work entitled '*Vani Granth*':<sup>30</sup>

*Mere Sant Kabir hain, Var aur Bari Ho, Dadu Tin  
Tilak Hain, Chit aur Na Dhari Ho.*

Presently *Dadupanthis* headquarters operate from Narana itself. Malika Mohammada<sup>31</sup> too attributes religious syncretism of Dadu in *Rajasthan* to Kabir during the early seventeenth century. Dadu's *Parbrahm Sampradaya*, in fact, included and fostered

unity and love among both Hindu and Muslims. His emphasis on the innate unity of human beings, irrespective of their varying beliefs and practices, led to the emergence of Dadu's two eminent disciples- Sundardas and Rajjab, coming from two different religious communities-Hindu and Islam in *Rajasthan*. In several parts of Uttar Pradesh, Jharkhand and Bihar, one can still hear devotional songs composed by Sundar Das being sung in the Kabirpanth's *satsang*, and religious gatherings. We were told during the field works that traditionally *Dadupanth* is believed to have established 52 religious centres called *Dadu Dwara*, spread across parts of Jaipur, Mewar, Bikaner and Alwar, apart from some centres in Punjab and Gujarat. *Dadupanthis* can be presently categorized into three types-*Viraktas*, *Nagas* and *Vistardharis*, largely following similar pattern of the Kabirpanth followings, except the *Nagas*, who carry arms and work as armed forces for the panth.

In the Alwar region of the present Rajasthan, Laldas,<sup>32</sup> another eminent disciple of Kabirpanth, who is estimated to have died in 1648, spread Kabir's teachings. He himself came from Meo caste, a predatory tribe of then Rajputana. He has also emphasized on the devotion to ineffable Ram and had accepted Kabir as his *sadguru*. Although his followings in the region presently do not form part of the mainstream Kabirpanth, yet ideologically they carry forward Kabir's teachings in their daily life.

Rajputana saw another religious figure in Dariya<sup>33</sup> who is initially said to have been spreading Kabir's message during this century. Dariya was born in a Muslim family, in village Rain, forming part of then Marwar in 1676. He became a disciple of Prem Dayal, a *sadhu* in the line of *Dadupanth*.



Around the same time Kabir's teachings were reformulated by an eminent figure in present Uttar Pradesh, popularly known as Malukdas (1571-1673) who began his tirade against the social evils and religious persecutions in the early part of the century. Born in the late sixteenth century in Karaa, near Allahabad, he is said to have begun his religious journey by the declaration that

*Mere man basi gaye sahib Kabir, Char Dag se  
satguru nyara,  
Ajaro Amar Sharir, Das Maluk Saluk Kahat hai,  
Khojo Khasam Kabir.*<sup>34</sup>

It is said that he was initiated into the Kabirpanth by Murari Swami, a Kabirpanth *sadhu*. According to Brahmlinmuni, Maluk had *darshan* of Kabir in the dream.<sup>35</sup> During his long life of around 108 years, Maluk Das kept on spreading Kabir's *vanis* in his own ways, which became so effective that in due course a distinct group of *Malukdasi* followings called *Malukpanthis* emerged in various parts of Uttar Pradesh such as Allahabad, Jaunpur, Banaras, Fatehpur, Lucknow etc.

During the early years of this century, another *sadhu* from the Kabirpanth is said to have spread Kabir's *vanis* in Gazipur region. Our informants believe that it was one Dayadas and his followers who drew a sizeable following during this period. One of them named Mayamana found a woman disciple named Babari after whom there developed another *panth* called *Babirpanth* in the surrounding area of Delhi.<sup>36</sup> She is said to have established her own centre in Delhi where her disciple named Biru succeeded on the seat of *guru* after her death. Many eminent sants got associated with her seat (*gaddi*); namely *Yari sahib*, his followers- Keshav Das, Mast Muhammad sahib, Sufi sahib, Sheikh sahib and

Bulle Shah. Tradition has that except Bulle Shah, all of them kept themselves busy in and around Delhi. Bulle Shah,<sup>37</sup> on the other hand, concentrated himself at Bhurkurawa in the present Gazipur district of Uttar Pradesh.

Bhurkurawa gradually emerged one of the strongest centres of the tradition which began to spread Kabir combining him along with some other *sants* in so distinct way that it led to the rise of the *Satnami* movement from Kotawa in Uttar Pradesh under the leadership of Jagjivan Das (1669-1760) towards the end of the seventeenth century. Many scholars have associated *Satnami* movements of different regions with the teachings and traditions of Kabir as Ramdas Lamb<sup>38</sup> in his recent work has rightly shown. During the early seventeenth century, the Kabirpanth found a strong expression in the rise of Haridas after whom a distinct *Niranjani* community emerged in Rajasthan. Haridas and his followers are believed to be the earliest compiler of Kabir's *vanis* in India called *Kabir Parichai* in Hindi. Winnand Callewaert has found an earliest manuscript of this text dated 1636 which implies that Kabir's influence in the region as well over the followings of Haridas was definitely very deep. To quote Winnand,

If one looks carefully at the manuscripts one has to conclude that there was a very exciting manipulations of Anantdas' *Kabir Parichai* going on in the early 17<sup>th</sup> century. It was a 'living' text indeed. Why and how this happened is a challenging question that encouraged me to print the complete text of

this *Parichai* again, looking at the manuscripts available.<sup>39</sup>

Haridas, the founder of the *Niranjani* or *Haridasi* sect shows his gratitude to Kabir in the following lines as quoted by some of our informants in Jodhpur-'*Jan Haridas Anand Ehaj, Apna Man Parmodhi, karara Kabir Panth Ka, So ham Liya sodhi.*'<sup>40</sup> Most of the *Niranjani* disciple to whom we met in Didwana, their headquarters hold Kabir in high esteem and tend to accept its linkage with his teachings.

Thus it becomes clear that the seventeenth century had been a significant phase in the history of the Kabirpanth. Some of the earliest maths of the *panth* not only continued but also registered expansion. However, Kabir's teachings also began to be spread in the name of the successive proponents who, in fact, owed to Kabir, thereby yet discrete traditions ensued in various parts of India so much so that it probably became difficult for the Kabir followers to assemble under one umbrella organization, or they themselves never felt its need to have a united forum. As a result we note that in the coming centuries, there emerged a number of parallel religious sects that commonly owed to Kabir, yet many maintained a tangible distance from the Kabirpanth which in itself was emerging as a confederation of internally differentiated body.

### Footnote

1. Shukdev Singh, *Sant Kabir aur Bhagatahi Panth*, Hindi, Vishwvidyalaya Prakashan, Varanasi, 1998, p.26.
2. I have succeeded in obtaining the *Guru-Pranali* of the Bhagatahi branch in a manuscript form written in 1874 (1281 *Fasli Samvat*) from Gautam Goswami, 65, resident of Balia-Pokhara, Siwan, Bihar. See (Annexure-1 and 2 a,b,c and Annexure 25 a,b).

It is necessary to keep in mind some facts about Gautam, the preserver of all these documents. He has been a Kabir disciple since 1969. Earlier he was an *Arya Samaji* and living at an Arya Samaji Mandir of Barginiya in Sitamarhi district. A Bhagatahi math at Arariya, a *qasba* near Barginiya drew him to the Kabirpanth. Under the influence of the math's Mahant, he had taken a vow to celibacy, which he kept till 1984, when he decided to revert back to a household life. In between 1979 and 1984, he remained a Mahant of Samanpur math, which has been a sub-branch of the Kabir Chaura, Varanasi. He became a householder follower since then and leads a family life. Most significantly, he has been the man behind arranging a number of source materials for the studies of Shukdev Singh, Vasudev Singh and also Shobha Kant Jha, as he has been a self motivated indigenous researcher of the Kabirpanth tradition. For this task he

remained on his cycle wheel almost for 14 months and travelled all across India to collect these materials. He had undertaken a nation-wide tour of most of the Kabir maths on cycle alone. During its course, he claims he had collected both written and oral tradition existing for the Bhagatahi branch. The oft-quoted bhagatahi map of sub-branches of the *Bhagathi* branch was first prepared by Gautam Goswami alone, but none has till date revealed this fact to the readers of the Kabirpanth. On my query, Gautam innocently reveals the fact that he was asked by the present Mahant Ramrup to make a map on which all the sub-branches could be shown. Moreover, Ramrup Goswami, the Mahant of Chatiya-Barharwa, and the Mahants of Dhanauti branch's maths as well, admitted before me while Gautam too was present in the interview that the map solely owes to Gautam, who had prepared it on the nominal payment to him by Ramrup Goswami. While interviewing Gautam, I also realized as if he himself has an encyclopaedic knowledge of the Bhagatahi tradition year-wise. His claim that all these manuscripts he himself provided to the Hindi scholar Late Shukdev Singh and Mahant Ramrup Goswami, yet they have nowhere acknowledged his contributions in the books written and published by them; Gautam Goswami, interviewed, 14-15 Feb, 2015

3. Vairatpur math is no more in existence, as it was swept away by river Koshi during its repeated floods, the bane

of north Bihar. The following description of the centres are entirely based on the oral tradition as prevalent among the educated sections of the Bhagatahi branch, mostly interviewed by me at Chatiya, Barharawa, Tadhawa, Dhanauti and Mahants of its associated maths at Turaki, and Samastipur in Bihar in between 14 Feb-16 Feb 2015. For detailed study of these regional estates or *raj*, one can consult, Stephen Henningham, *Peasant Movements in Colonial India: North Bihar (1917-1942)*, Australian National University, Canberra, 1982; and Stephen Henningham, *A Great Estate and Its Landlords in Colonial India: Darbhanga 1860-1942*, OUP, New Delhi, 1990.

4. Jean Baptiste Tavernier, *Travels in India*, (trans. from the French by V. Bell), Vol.II, Macmillan & Co, New York, 1889 (1676), p.229.
5. Krishna Kalki, has been running a television channel presently from Delhi. His article prepared on the request of Vivek Das, the *Acharya* of the Kabir-Chaura, Varanasi can be seen in *Siddhpeeth Kabir-Chaura*, (eds. Krishna Kalki and Ram Murarij, Hindi, Kabirvani Prakashan Kendra, Varanasi, 2007, pp.87-102. I rely on his article for the following descriptions of the *Kabir- Chaura* unless otherwise mentioned. Events related to Jahangir and Aurangzeb are often reiterated by Vivek Das, the present *Acharya* of the Kabir-Chaura, both in his *bhashan* among devotees and intellectulas gathered on occasions where I

myself noted him referring to such stories; I had been an invitee in some of his *bhashans* (lectures) and *satsangs* in the NCERT, New Delhi, in 1999, Jallundhar in 2014 and Chandigarh in 2015.

6. David N. Lorenzen, *Kabir Legends and Anantdas's Kabir Parichai*, Shrisatguru Publication, Delhi, 1992, p.17
7. I have succeeded in getting these documents xeroxed on the special permission of the Chairman of the Sunni Waqf Board, Lucknow, visited, 15 March, 2015. See these Persian texts as (Annexure-28). The zamindar of Bansi, who gradually won the title of a *raja* also, as locals of the region recall, the *raja's* descendents later have had continued association with the Kabir Mazar, and gave away annual *chadhauna* till the end of the 20<sup>th</sup> century.
8. Khadim Hussain Ansari's family still preserves the cap, a piece of towel and a loin cloth of Kabir, photographs taken and interviewed, Magahar, U.P, 16 Feb, 2015 (Annexure-29 a,b,c).
9. A map of the Kabir Mazar of 1832, procured from the English Office of Gorakhpur shown to me by Khadim Hussain, does not indicate the existence of two structures within the complex of the *Mazar*. He just allowed me to take snaps of the map, as its poor condition and length was not fit for Xeroxing or scanning. (Annexure-30 a,b,c).
10. F.E. Keay, *Kabir and His Followers*, Sri Satguru Publications, Delhi, 1996 (1931)

11. There does exist an inactive math in the Budhwari area of Nagpur, and the local people do not know the name of the *sant* whose *Samadhi* lies there. Although the math is developed over the *Samadhi*, paid homage by the local Kabirpanthis and devotees in the sanctum sanctorum of the math mainly coming from the Koshti caste (weaver community). I had myself visited Nagpur to conduct field works on 18 Oct.2013. Uday, PF, had to visit centres in Nagpur more than once in 2014 (Annexure-31).
12. One can see the details on Suhawal state of Baghelkhand in W.W. Hunter, *Imperial Gazetteer of India*, Vol.VIII, Trubner & Company, London, 1887, p.47. Uday, PF, also visited Suhawal, 13 Dec, 2013 (Annexure-32 a,b,c).
13. Praman Das had been one of the blood relatives of the Narayan Das lineage. For details see, Abhilash Das, *Kabir Darshan*, Parkh Prakashak, Allahabad, 1982, pp.584-585.
14. Uday, PF, interviewed and conducted field works at Sohawal, and Panna and Uchehara, 13-15 Dec, 2013. The details are based on his reports. (Annexure-33 and 34)
15. Uday, PF, conducted field work and interviewed functionaries, Kabir ashram Rustampura, Sangrampur, Surat, Gujarat, 27 Jan. 2014 (Annexure-35).
16. It being a resourceful math, the math functionaries have taken care to maintain a written genealogy of the Mahants having succeeded there.



17. We could not visit this math, but the fact was corroborated by the present Mahant Devendra Das, as the management also runs a college there, based on my telephonic conversation with him, 5 June 2015.
18. We took snaps of the inscribed genealogy of the Mahants on the front wall of the temple.
19. Traditonal view over Manikpur is divided; to some of my informants, this Manikpur is linked to the Manikpur of the United Provinces, where Malukdas was born and Malukdasi kabirpanthis later migrated to the parts of the Central Provinces after sanyasi rebellions in the late 17<sup>th</sup> century. To others, Manikpuri denotes the Chhattisgarhi Manikpur, where is a sizeable number of natives drew towards Kabir's teachings.
20. Punjab connection acquires some credibility as a large number of Kabirpanthis in present Punjab and Jammu call themselves Kabir *bhagats* forming part of the Kabirpanth caste. Some Ram Kabir followers of Los Angeles, USA too relate themselves from Punjab. However, Ram Kabirs of London, UK relate themselves to the United Provinces. I met them while I was in the California, USA, to attend an international conferece, July 2015. In the same year i had visited the UK and interacted the number of Kabir followers living in the parts of London.
21. Nabhadas, *Shribhaktamal*, Hindi, Tejkumar Press, Lucknow, 1969. This book also contains a commentary of Priyadas said to be written in 1712.

22. For details on Ramyash, see, Abhilash Das, *Kabir Darshan*, (Hindi), Parakh Prakashak Kabir Sansthan, Allahabad , 1982, p. 202.
23. Raghavdas, *Raghavdas Krit Bhaktmal*, Rajasthan Oriental Reasearch Institute, Jodhpur, 1965 (1880).
24. I describe their migration in my forthcoming book.
25. I had visited and stayed overnight at Pune *Kabir ashram* on 19 Oct, 2013, and interviewed Sudha *Bahan*, the present Mahant of the *ashram* and a few neighbouring followers. Uday, the PF too went there and tried to get hold of some written evidences, but our efforts went in vain. I also interviewed, Sudha *Bahan's* eldest daughter who has been doing Ph.D on the philosophical aspects of Kabir's teachings (Annexure-36).
26. Kedarnath Dvivedi had also met Sudha *Bahan's* husband, who was the preceding Mahant and had interviewed him about 60 years ago. He has described the Pune *Kabir Ashram* in his book op.cit., pp.344-345
27. Uday, PF's field data, has been the lone source of our information as described above about Aurangabad and its nearby villages, interviewed Mahant and associated disciples, 2 Sept. 2013
28. The document can be seen as Annexure-37 and 38. It was also collected from the present Mahant of Aurangabad math.

29. Neeti M. Sadarangani, *Bhakti Poetry in Medieval India: Its Inception, Cultural Encounter and Impact*, Sarup and Sons, 2004, p.81
30. *Vani Granth*, quoted in Parashuram Chaturvedi, *Uttar Bharat ki Sant Parampara*, Bharti Bhandar, Allahabad, 1972, p.520
31. Malika Mohammada, *Foundations of the Composite Culture in India*, Aakar Books, New Delhi, 2007, pp. 259-260
32. One can see Laldas's *Samadhi* still preserved at the Dauliganj Kabir *ashram*, Lucknow. When I visited this *ashram* and was informed that Lal Das had died in Lucknow and so he was given *Samadhi* there, I had captured *Samadhi's* shot in my camera (Annexure-39 a,b,c,d).
33. We have some scholarly works on the Dariya Das and his *panth*; one can see, *Kabirpanth aur Dariya Panth(Bihar) Ka Adhyayan*, Hindi, Digital Library of India, Google, 1968.
34. Malukdas's most quoted *vanis* has been: '*Azgar kare na Chakari, Panchhi kare na kaam, Das Maluka kah Gaye sab ke daata Ram*'
35. Brahmlinmuni, *Sadguru Kabir Charitam*, Baroda, p.730
36. I have relied for information on the *Babaripanth* on the works of Hindi scholars such as Parashuram Chaturvedi, *Uttari Bharat Ki Sant Parampara*, Hindi, Bharati Bhandar, Allahabad, 1972 (1959).

37. Bulle Shah, *ibid*, p.755.
38. For the history of the *Satnami* movements and its different locations have been scholarly described in the recent works of Ramdas Lamb, *Rapt in the Name: The Ramnamis, Ramnam, and Untouchable religion in Central India*, State University of New York Press, Albany, 2002, p. 52; and Saurabh Dube, *Untouchable Past: Religion, Identity, Power among a Central Indian Community, 1780-1950*, State University of New York Press, Albany, 1998.
39. Winand Callewaert, *The Hagiographies of Anantdas: The Bhakti Poets of North India*, Curzon Press, Surrey, 2000.
40. I conducted a short field work among *Niranjani* disciples in this region, 9 June 2015. It is noteworthy that Munishwar Ray 'Munish', the author of the '*Kabir-Panth Ki Jagu Shakha*' had been a member of the *Niranjanipanth* in Bihar (Annexure-40).

## Kabirpanth in the Eighteenth Century

Eighteenth century had been the period during which Kabirpanth, like the polity of Mughal India, seems to have been passing through rapid transition. The declining Mughal Empire and consequent rise of the Maratha powers, beginning from the western India to the parts of Bihar and Orissa, affected the normal course of the growth of Kabirpanth in parts of the then Central Provinces and Orissa. At the same time, some of the local *rajas* came out to extend their personal and material support to some of the devotional centres of Kabir. In some cases, the local *rajas* and petty *zamindars* encouraged the initiation of such centres in their respective areas. In addition, we also note some centres which are presently not closely associated with the Kabirpanth, were, during this period, initiated in the honour of Kabir, in many regions; such as Rajputana, Punjab, United Provinces and Oudh etc. Consequently, while some of the earlier centres of Kabirpanth were losing their sheen, a few of these were also consolidating their institutional base and followings, sometimes leading to the rise of internal friction both within and outside the emerging branches of the Kabirpanth. Significantly enough, the earliest description of Kabirpanth by a European was also written during this very century.

Shukdev Singh<sup>1</sup> refers to one of the manuscripts which dates the death of Banwari Gosain, the eighth Mahant of the Bhagatahi headquarters at Barharawa in 1720. After his death, Bettiah raj is said to have played a crucial role in managing the affairs of the

Kabirpanth active in his kingdom. The Bettiah *raj* belonged to the *Bhumihar* caste and hence always had hidden soft-corner for the members of the upper castes whenever it was warranted. His casteist position in the selection and management of the Dhanauti math is still recalled by some senior Kabirpanthis in the region.

Bhagatahi headquarters of the Kabirpanth had finally shifted to Dhanauti then situated in the Chhapara district of Bihar around mid-eighteenth century. It is said that this math emerged as the headquarters during the time of Bhishma Goswami, who was an inhabitant of Dhanauti itself. He was one of the four closest disciples of Banwari Goswami, their *guru* at Chatiya-Barharawa math. He was *Koiri* by caste, and it was, on account of lower status of his caste than that of Nayan Goswami, a Brahmin, that the *raja* of Bettiah preferred the latter for the seat of Mahant at Chatiya-Barharawa math. Frustrated, Bhishma returned back to his native place, where he developed a small centre with the active support of his admirers in and around Dhanauti.

However, Nayan Goswami, the *Acharya* at the Chatiya-Barharawa math, remorsefully apologized before Bhishma Goswami, after the death of their *guru* Banwari Goswami, and made all efforts to successfully convince Bhishma to accept the *gaddi* at Chatiya-Barharawa. Bhishma is said to have ultimately conceded to Nayan's request and accepted the *acharya gaddi*. Since then Dhanauti math got associated as a sub-branch of the Chatiya-Barharawa *gaddi* of the Bhagatahi branch. Some informants, however ascribes Nayan Goswami's dwindling health as the main factor of his renunciation of the Mahant *gaddi* for Bhishma Goswami. Nayan Goswami was, however, once again donated about 40 *bighas* of land by the *Bettiah raj* to lead

his remaining life at Rarhia,<sup>2</sup> where presently the math formed by Nayan still exists.

Gradually Dhanauti math itself acquired pre-eminence by virtue of those disciples who had made exceptional contribution to the advancement of their *gurus*, particularly Bhishma Goswami related to Dhanauti. It is said that one Mahant of Basdilla<sup>3</sup> alone, had surrendered his 400 *bighas* of land to the Dhanauti math towards the end of the eighteenth century, by the time the latter had begun to gain predominant position among the sub-branches of the branch. The donated land lay near Kanchanpur, forming part of district Kushinagar in the present Uttar Pradesh, about 70 kms from Dhanauti. During this period of Dhanauti's aggrandisement, most striking fact had been the shrinking base of the Chatiya-Barharawa's sub-branches. Most of its sub-branches had either begun to be closed or abandoned, unattended by a legitimate functionary for these sub branches, such as; Vairatpur, Khemsar and Belsand. Whereas the directly associated sub-branches, taking off during and after the *gaddi* of Bhishma Goswami, showed their particular allegiance to the functionaries deputed at the Dhanauti math.

During the *gaddi* of Kokil Das,<sup>4</sup> of the Kabir-Chaura of Benaras, the latter had begun to play a crucial role in shaping the polity of the modern Kashi kingdom. Kashi as a distinct kingdom was consolidating its position against a number of its hostile forces during the early part of this century. In the process, Kokil Das, the then Mahant of Kabir Chaura, is said to have blessed Mansa Ram,<sup>5</sup> the founder of the Kashi kingdom during mid-eighteenth century. Before Mansa Ram consolidated his dynasty in 1738, he had to seek Kokil's blessings more particularly to ensure popular support in his favour, then commanded by Kokil, as the head of

the Kabir-Chaura. By the time Mansa Ram died, the *gaddi* of the Kabir-Chaura was succeeded by Ram sahib. It is said that Mansa Ram had also sought Ram sahib's blessings once again for Balwant Singh, as his successor to the throne of Kashi in 1740.<sup>6</sup> Besides offering religious patronage to the succeeding Kashi kings, Mahant Ram sahib is also said to have drawn Panna Rani, one of the queens of Balwant Singh, towards Kabirpanth. She was later formally converted to the *panth*. As she was a Chandel princess, Kabir's teachings brought under influence a number of disciples from the Chandel dynasty of Vijaygarh as well. Gulab Kunwari, another queen of Balwant, had also grown deep interest in the Kabir-Chaura so much so that she used to visit this math every Thursday unfailingly.

It is said that Kabir-Chaura's role in the making of Chet Singh as the undisputed successor of the Kashi kingdom had been crucial. Chet Singh was the son of Balwant Singh from queen Panna, who had converted to the Kabirpanth. Ultimately contenders of Chet Singh lost their force once Mahant of Kabir-Chaura declared his choice in favour of Chet Singh as the *naresh* of Kashi. In fact, Kabir Chaura's mediation was sought to resolve the dispute regarding the successor of the Balwant Singh, which had arisen during the life-time of the *raja*, as there was no consensus between the two queens of the *raja*. Both the queens staked the claim for succession to their sons. The law of primogeniture had added to the disputes, for the son of the older queen was younger to that of the younger queen.<sup>7</sup> The *raja* himself was not in an easy position to decide. In the circumstance, the functionaries of the Kabir-Chaura came to play the decisive role. Chet Singh, being the son of queen Panna, became a favorite choice of the Kabir-Chaura.



It is said that a new centre of Kabir came into existence in southern part of Bihar at Gaya during the latter half of this century. Tradition associates this centre with the reign of *raja* Mitrajit Singh of Tekari *raj*<sup>8</sup> who ruled from 1762-1841. For quite some years, Mitrajit remained under the tutelage of his mother as he was just a few months old at the time of his father's death in 1762. *Maharaja Mitrjit* is said to have donated his entire *Bag* (garden) to the son of his scholarly minister named Bhagwan Dev Dwivedi.<sup>9</sup> The name of the son was Ramraj, born in 1725. His mother is also said to have played a significant role in the education of Ramraj, who excelled in the learning of Sanskrit and religious scriptures. Gradually Ramraj came in contact of Gurdayal Das and Guru Sharan Das, two famous saints then being Mahants respectively of maths at Fatuha and *Kabir-Chaura* Benares. In their company, Ramraj decided to lead a *virakta* life and emerged as an eminent Kabir disciple in that region of Bihar. Mitrajit continued to provide material support to the centre thus opened by Ramraj, even after the latter's death in 1806. His *Samadhi* is still preserved in a cave in which he himself used to meditate. The oldest building of the *Kabir Bag* is built over the cave *Samadhi* of Ram Rahas. He became famous as Ram Rahas Das after his conversion to the Kabirpanth by Guru Sharan Das, the then *Acharya at Kabir-Chaura*. It emerged as one of the most resourceful maths, in south Bihar. The centre got its name after the *bag*, as *Kabir Bag*, Gaya, and began to work under the overall supervision of the Kabir-Chaura, Benares, however presently the functionaries of both the maths are not in good terms. Ram Rahas is also believed to be the prolific writer on Kabir's teachings. One of the didactic scriptures titled *Panchgranthi*<sup>10</sup> is said to be written by him. It is believed to be a valuable

contribution made to the Kabirpanth by a prominent member of the *Kabir-Chaura* branch. A number of the Kabir centres is also said to have emerged under the influence of Ram Rahas Das, the founder of *Kabir Bag Kabir Ashram*, Gaya; such as, at Bahadurpur, Sikandarpur and Pavapuri in the present Nalanda district- all adding to the sub-branches of the *Kabir-Chaura* during the late eighteenth and early nineteenth century.

At Magahar, the Kabir Mazar is also said to have come under the threat of communal strife during this century. Although this event has not drawn much attention of the scholars who have had unquestioned belief in the story that there has always been Hindu and *Muslim Samadhi* at Magahar; we have, however, all the reason to doubt this type of belief. Apart from Buchanan, who had noted the establishment of a Hindu *Samadhi* having been of recent origin, the Basti Gazetteer exactly dates the earliest arrival of a Hindu Mahant at Magahar in 1764.<sup>11</sup> F.E. Keay adds further fact that a Hindu *sadhu* was also killed in the fracas leading to the Mazar's split, resulting in the erection of a distinct Hindu *Samadhi* in the same complex of the former.

*Dharmdasi* branch of the Kabirpanth too came under strains for various reasons during the early years of this century. We have evidences to show that hereditary principle of succession being followed at the *gaddi* of its headquarters had been facing oppositions at several places. This branch is said to have shifted its branch at more than one place particularly in parts of the Central India, which was gradually coming under the rule of the British *raj* simultaneous with loosening of the hold of the local rulers in the region. The Kalachuri *rajas* of Ratanpur in general is said to have been kind enough to give the *Dharmdasi gurus* sizeable space to operate smoothly. It is probably the same

Ratanpur which finds mention in Abul Fazl's description as having a Kabir's musauleum. It is said one of the *rajas*, named Ratnsen and his queen Vedmati had become disciples of Sudarshan Nam, the third *Acharya* of the *Dharmdasi* branch, which was then centred at Ratanpur itself. Ratanpur had been Sudarshan's maternal place as well. Moreover, he found such a disciple in Subharan Sahu in the same *qasba*, who surrendered his entire property to the *guru* Sudarshan. Nonetheless, Subharan is said to have implored his *guru* to accept his lone daughter as his wife, which the *guru*, Sudarshan, gleefully accepted.<sup>12</sup>

Before the dismantling of the *Rajput* raj of Ratanpur by Bhonsle<sup>13</sup> (one of the Mararatha invaders) in 1758, Kabirpanth is said to have been spreading its branch unhindered with the indirect support of the local *rajas*. Mainly four *Dharmdasi Acharyas* are said to have lived through major part of the eighteenth century- Bala Pir, Kewalnam, Amolnam and Surat Sanehi. Pramodnam 'Bala Pir', the hereditary successor of Kulpatinam, was born of his wife named Sumati at Ratanpur. Bala Pir also got married to a family of a Kasaundhan *bania* at Ratanpur itself. His name is associated with a number of legends. He is believed to have an encounter with Muhammad Shah, the Mughal emperor (1719-1748) during one of his religious tours to Delhi. It is also said that the title of 'Bala Pir' was first bestowed on Pramodnam by the emperor as he was like a *pir* (a *sufi* religious guide) to him but having attained it at a very young age.

A related legend is still popular in the region when Pramodnam is said to have retaliated to the inappropriate gesture of emperor Muhammad Shah who had ordered him to keep the accompanying drum-beat silent while entering the Red Fort in Delhi. The band of drummers actually formed part of the

delegation that was to meet the Mughal emperor there in Pramodnam's leadership. Bala Pir is said to have taken emperor's order into his stride and decided, in turn, to demonstrate his spiritual power then and there to the disrespectful emperor. Pramodnam's manoeuvred the situation in such a way that royal '*naubat*' which was to strike at the arrival of the emperor at his throne did not bell in the Red Fort. The event is said to have happened in 1731. The emperor is said to have fallen in disbelief for the moment but decided to meet the miraculous *sadhu* in person. As soon as he left to see Pramodnam along with his grand royal cavalry, Pramodnam also set out on the way to the Red Fort. Both of them are said to have encountered each other near *Chandani Chowk*. To his great astonishment, Muhammad Shah found that Pramodnam, the leading *sadhu*, was actually moving on a slab of stone (*shila*), a mechanism which he had neither heard nor seen ever across his empire. It was this inexplicable situation which had forced the emperor to treat him as 'Bala Pir' (an infant or dominitable pir).

Pramodnam's *guruship* is replete with several other legends which help us in coming to terms with his tenure as the *Acharya* of the *Dharmdasi* branch. A legend associates him with Bimbaji, the Maratha Bhonsale ruler of the time. According to Saurabh Dube<sup>14</sup> Bimabaji (1758-87) was the then ruler of Ratanpur. The legend states that the *Dharmdasi* headquarters had, by this time, accumulated so much wealth that the *Acharya* used to lead a chivalrous and lavish life. They used to have a number of high quality horses in their possession. Some of their horses had become so popular that local *rajas* often attempted to take them away from the *Acharyas*.

The legend relating to Bambaji Bhonsale states that Pramodnam did not want to part with his horses at any cost. Bambaji has taken control of the Ratanpur estate as a part of the Maratha kingdom, but Pramodnam did not surrender his religious autonomy to the *raja's* suzerainty. He did not even entertain messengers of Bambaji who had visited Pramod to buy his heroic horses. Denied, Bambaji then hatched a conspiracy to take away those horses at any cost, no matter if Pramodnam was to be killed in the process. The Maratha head is once said to have called Pramodnam in his court on the occasion of Holi and attempted to kill him. But the *guru* escaped from the brutal clutches of the Marathas at Ratanpur. He escaped through the secret route and appeared at village Bangoli near Raipur, the present capital of Chhattisgarh, the place where he had a considerable number of disciples. Raipur is about 180 kilometres from Ratanpur. He did not return to his then emerging headquarters centred at Kudurmāl (Koogharmāl) as Bambaji would have easily anticipated Pramodnam escape route.

In a very short time, however, the local *raja* of Haihaya dynasty centred at Raipur<sup>15</sup> too developed interest in the valiant horses of the *guru*. This time, the royal forces did not allow Pramodnam to escape, and encircled him from all sides and took away all the horses from him. The *guru* and his supporters were helpless before the royal forces, but the horses could not reach *raja's* fort. All the horses, as the legend goes, died before entering the royal fort. After this event, the *guru* had to leave Bangoli too in search of a safer place. It is said that he along with his troupe of *sadhus* took the longer route along the bank of river Narmada.

While he was passing through Mandala kingdom, roughly about 350 kms from the starting point, the then local Gond *raja* heard

of his movements, and he immediately seized upon the opportunity as the last resort, to try to get his semi-dead son revived by the popular healing touch of the *guru*. The *raja* begged of him to stop for a while to bless his son to get new lease of life. The *guru* could not deny *raja's* request and his son miraculously is said to have survived following *guru's* advice. The then *raja* impressed upon the *guru* not to leave Mandala with the reassurances of his complete safety and security in his estate. The *raja* is also said to have built a house for the *guru's* residence and his religious preachings. Pramodnam is said to have taken his last breath in Mandala itself.<sup>16</sup> Before his death, he had anointed his son Kevalnam as his successor to the *guru's* seat, then opening at Mandala.

Kewal Nam, the fifth *Guru* of this branch, however, shifted his seat of *guru* to Dhamdha which is situated on Bemetra road, 33 kms away from the district headquarters at Durg in the present Chhattisgarh. He was just 15 years of age when he was deputed as the head of this branch. Kevalnam was actually born in Mandala situated in the district of the same name in Madhya Pradesh. Although as a youngster he had spent his time in Mandala, Kevalnam was not very happy with the available amenities at his Mandala centre. In the circumstance, a group of disciples from Dhamadha is said to have requested Kevalnam to shift the Dharamdasi headquarters from Mandala to Dhamadha. He acceded to their wish and shifted there. Kevalnam breathed his last at Dhamdha centre, which was originally built at the ancestral property of Dushyant Das,<sup>17</sup> the present Mahant of the centre. Presently Dushyant claims he is the 9<sup>th</sup> successor Mahant of this centre popular as Kevaldham, named after Kevalnam.

Kevalnam however had deputed his son named Amolnam to succeed as the Mahant of the centre after his death in 1743. He did so but he did not find the place convenient and safe for the spread of his *panth*, and hence once again he shifted the *Dharmdasi Vansh* headquarters to Mandala. Amolnam, the *Acharya* of the *Dharmdasi branch* in the meanwhile, is said to have declared Surat Sanehi as his successor son to the *guru-gaddi*. Before he died at Mandala in 1768, he had already deputed Surat Sanehi as his successor.<sup>18</sup> But Surat Sanehi was seriously getting worried about the growth of his *panth* in the midst of political turmoils then engulfing Mandala and its surroundings regions following Anglo-Maratha wars.

In the circumstances, Surat Sanehi found a resourceful *malguzar* in village Singhori, who showed his willingness to provide a substantial area of land for the shifting of the *Dharmdasi* headquarters. The Rawat *malguzar*, as he is remembered in oral tradition, was deeply obliged to Surat Sanehi, who is said to have earlier revived his lone son from a deadly disease. The *malguzar* is also said to have played crucial role in developing a fresh and friendly relationship of the Kabirpanth *Acharya* with the Nagpur rulers for whom he was serving as a *malguzar*. Till his death in 1796, Surat Sanehi continued to consolidate his religious followings from Singhori centre.<sup>19</sup> It is said that the Maratha rulers of the Nagapur kingdom had developed amicable relation with Surat Sanehi at the *Singhori Ashram*. The Rawat *malguzar* thus rescued Surat Sanehi from the embarrassing situation and the *Acharya* was riding on the wave of expanding his *panth*.

According to the version of the *Dharmdasi* texts, Surat Sanehi had two wives and that the second wife alone could bear a son who was to succeed him after his death as per the prevalent

tradition of succession at Dharamdas headquarters. Rajendra Prasad,<sup>20</sup> the official writer of the *Dharmdasi Vansh gaddi*, however refers to his second wife, as a '*das*' (serving hand), before she was accepted as his wife by Surat Sanehi.

Towards the end of the eighteenth century, *Dharmdasi* branch was once again heading towards another split. The split which took formal shape in the early nineteenth century is once again attributed to the issue of the disputed issue of *virakta* and *Parivarik* character of the *Dharmdasi Acharya gaddi*. In fact this issue began to raise its head as Surat Sanehi is said to have developed some interest turning his *Vansh gaddi* into a *virakta* one, as it is pointed out by the group which separated itself from the Singhori centre, confronted several attempts of both criminal, legal and physical assaults by the functionaries of the pro-hereditary (*bind or vansh*) Dharamdasi group then in charge of the Singhori ashram. The central figure in this entire episode was one Sewa Das, who had claimed he had *darshan* of Kabir himself and was thus respectfully provided residence initially in the Singhori *ashram* itself by Surat Sanehi, the *Acharya*.

Before Sewa Das's separation from the *Vansh* tradition of the *Dharmdasi* branch, he claims, as described in the text, had spent about 28 years at the math of Surat Sanehi at the village Singhori, the then headquarters of the *Dharmdasi* branch. After he had *darshan* of Kabir, he had spent a few years in and around the villages situated near the *jungle*. Finally, he had reached Singhori where a Kabirpanth math had already been running under Mahant Surat Sanehi in 1774 (1831vs). Surat Sanehi is said to have extended warm welcome to Sewa Das and Dhyan Sahib wholeheartedly. Both of them continued to spend their time at



the Singhori math on the repeated request of the Mahant Surat Sanehi.

Surat Sanehi, as the Mahant of the *Bind gaddi* had a wife too, and both had been living there together. Sewa Das and Dhyani Das- both had been *viraktas* (independent of a family life) and were being treated spiritually higher than that of the Mahant himself by the followers of the neighbouring villages.

Dhyani Das, the narrator of the accounts of the events unfolding after they began to stay at the Singhori math, informs us that within the math complex, usually just three persons, apart from the duo, had been regularly living there- Sanehi, Yamuna Mai, Mahant's wife and a Dasi or a *sevika* (servile lady), who was a widow, named Ganga Bai. Dhyan Das, in his account, points out that, before his death in 1796 (1853vs), Surat Sanehi had emphasized upon Sewa Das to discontinue the *Vansh* (hereditary) tradition at Singhori math and instead continue 'Nad or virkta tradition of Mahant's succession at the seat of this math with a rider that it should remain part of the *Dharmdasi* branch against all odds. But Surat Sanehi's wish could not mature because groups of vested interest in and around Singhori did not want to put an end to the *bind gaddi* of Singhori, come what may be. Rajendra Prasad too admits that Sewa Das was selected as the '*pujari Mahant*' at Singhori.<sup>21</sup>

However Sewa Das continued to stay at one corner of the Singhori ashram on the repeated requests of Yamuna Mata as well a number of his disciples initiated by him in the neighbouring villages, such as; villages Ameri, Sankuri, Rohasi, Sanddeeh, Gidhawa, Khapari and Korasi and Kawardha among many others, the last being the place where Haqnam later shifted the headquarters from Singhori before he himself expired

in the very first decade of the nineteenth century. Sewa Das has already befriended and won a predominant Ramanandi Mahant in Raipur town in 1793 itself, a friend who later on proved to be the most reliable friend in bailing out Sewa Das from legal as well as humiliating conspiracies of Haqnam and his supporters.<sup>22</sup>

Before Sewa Das's actual separation from the *Vansh* tradition of the Dahrmdasi branch, he claims, as described in the text, had spent about 28 years at the math of Surat Sanehi at village Singhori, the then headquarters of the Dharmdasi branch. After he had *darshan* of Kabir, he had initially spent a few years in and around the villages situated near the jungle. Finally, he had reached Singhori where a Kabirpanth math had already been running under Mahant Surat Sanehi in 1774 (1831vs).<sup>23</sup> Surat Sanehi is said to have extended warm welcome to Sewa Das and Dhyani Sahib wholeheartedly. Both of them continued to spend their time at the Singhori math on the repeated request of the Mahant Sanehi.

Yet Surat Sanehi, enamoured by the spiritual height of Sewa Das, is said to have personally agreed to depute Sewa Das as his successor to his *gaddi* in contravention of the tradition of *Vansh* till then prevailing there. However, the Dharmdasi literature refutes such commitment or words of Surat Sanehi, yet accepts the fact that Surat Sanehi had just nominated him as a *pujari* of Singhori ashram, not successor. Whatever be the fact, in the ensuing melee for the succession, Haqnam emerged victorious and became the hereditary Acharya of the headquarters.

Haqnam was, according to the Dharmdasi literature and spokespersons, actually the lone son of Surat Sanehi from his second wife, but, for the supporters of Sewa Das, he was the son of the servile lady named Ganga Bae with whom some of Surat

Sanehi's close disciples were having illicit relationship. In the situation, the issue of succession to the *gaddi* of the Singhori acquired dangerous character as Surat Sanehi had expired all on a sudden, leaving him no scope to make a formal declaration of his successor's name.

The published version of the event does not recognize Haqnam as the legitimate son of Surat Sanehi, and shows him having died issueless. In fact, contemporary account, as described in the book, does not show Surat Sanehi having any relation with Ganga Bae either. It was one of the issues that Sewa Das and his admirers tried to score over their rival group that in either way Haqnam has no *locus standi* to succeed to the Singhori *gaddi* as he was neither a saintly figure nor a member of the Dharamdasi family lineage. Yet the coteries of yesmen close to the *gaddi* were bent upon the candidature of Haqnam, the son of Ganga Bae, to be the legal heir of Surat Sanehi, not the virakta Sewa Das. The pro-Haqnam group, according to Sewa Das, colluded together with the family of a local *malguzar*, exploiters of Ganga Bae and Appa Sahib Bhonsale,<sup>24</sup> Nagpur's fugitive Maratha *raja*, who extended full moral and material support to them. These people helped Haqnam to silence the voices of those who had been waiting to see the beginning of a new tradition of *virakta* successor to the *Acharya* seat of the Singhori *ashram* sooner than later. Appa Sahib's involvement in the episode makes it clear that his approval to the succession of Haqnam may have been procured before 1820 as Appa had to lead a fugitive life evading arrest from the British police from 1820 onwards till his death in Jodhpur in 1840.

Nadiya math, being a resourceful one, has been able to preserve its historical documents comparatively in a better condition than

many other maths. Mahants of this math are said to have left their accounts written in a manuscript form one to another upto the time of its sixth Mahants Balkrishan Das. Although the manuscript containing the accounts of six of its Mahants is not available presently, they have got it published in Hindi under the title of '*Nad Vansh Ka Sankshipt Itihas*' in 1996.

According to the version of this manuscript, Sewa Das, the founder of the Nadiya math, was originally an inhabitant of village Mandala where the headquarters of *Dharmdasi Achaya* had previously been shifted twice as described in the previous chapter. He was born in 1734 (1791vs).<sup>25</sup> His parents belonged to the same Kasaundhan *bania* caste to which Dharamdas, the founder of the *Dharmdasi* branch also hailed.

As Sewa Das narrates his life-stories to his successor Mahants at Nadiya, his parents, Tamel Sao (Sahu) and Vimala Devi had been Kabirpanth followers in Mandala. His parents had given him a childhood name of Sanamya Prashad. He had left his parental home at the age of 26 and engrossed himself in the search of Kabir, the *Sadguru*. Sewa Das was a disciple of one Gyani sahib to whom he had met, for the first time, in a *jungle* where the former had been grazing a buffalo of his family in a routine manner. In the pursuit, he left his home for Bandhogarh where Dharmadas had once lived his life. However, he could not reach there; on the way itself, amidst a *jungle*, he got lost in a meditative state continually for 27 days before reaching Dharamdas's center of Kabir in *Bandhogarh*. He claims that he had *darshan* of Kabir directly in the form of the Gyani Sahib/or in *Gyani* Sahib. To some scholars, Gyani Sahib, in fact, had been the actual name of his Kabir *panth guru*. Sanamar Prashad became

Sewa Das after having *darshan* of Kabir as he was re-christianed by his *sadguru*.

According to Sewa Das himself, the spectacular moments of his *darshan* of Kabir as Gyani Sahib or by Gyani had also a witness incidentally in another cattle-grazer named Dhyani Das, a *goala* of village Kheda, situated at the other end of the same *jungle*. Dhyani Das, too, is said to have been immediately transformed and drawn to Sewa Das as one of his constant companion thereafter, not as a disciple but as a *guru-bhai*.

While Sewa Das was held in high esteem at the Sighori *Ashram* as a spiritual figure, he was increasingly getting helpless in the face of rising cases of shameful acts particularly practised by Haqnam himself in the name of Kabir and Dharamdas. He had half-heartedly come to accept Haqnam's headship at Singhori, but some of the shameful acts allegedly committed by Haqnam and his hunchmen proved to be the last straw that broke the camel's back for his spiritual consciousness. That was the day when a lady disciple herself narrated in front of a band of *sadhus* including Sewa Das. The ritual was called *Pan parvana*, involving shameful acts she had to undergo a few hours ago in the hand of Haqnam, thus proving the apprehensions a fact for all those who heard it

The manuscript describes the open submission of the lady disciple in public as follows. One day a lady disciple named Peeli Bae, the wife of Shambhu Das of Singhori, herself narrated her ordeal she had undergone innocently in the name of the rite of *Pan parvana* administered to her by Haqnam. She herself narrated it before Sewa Das and the band of *Sadhus* who were sitting around Sewa Das in 1812.<sup>26</sup>

She had great honour for Sewa Das, and hence she went upto Sewa Das to touch his feet on her way to home from the *ashram*. When she came close to touch his feet, as a Kabirpanth disciple usually postures for *bandagi*, Sewa Das first asked her whether she had taken bath by that time or not. She replied in affirmative as an early bath was then a pre-condition for the administration of *Pan Parvana* or *Ajavan Veera* she had just taken from Haqnam. The *sadhus* who heard of *Pan parvana* hastened to use it as the right opportunity to get first-hand details of the ritual performed by Haqnam. They persuasively asked Peeli Bae to divulge the details how he performed *Pan parvana* to her. In the beginning, feigning her innocence, she replied politely that there was no point in giving details of the *Pan parvana* as she had been administered to her, for they all were experienced and honourable seniors to her, fully familiar with these details in their own capacities.

Finding the occasion slipping out of hands, Sewa Das himself intervened and asked Peeli Bae to take the query in right spirit, as they wanted to know about the details of the *Pan parvana* with the sole objective of rectifying the procedure if any mistake or lapse was then being committed by Haqnam in its administration. Getting reassurances from Sewa Das, she disclosed the actual ordeal she had a few hours ago undergone: that the *pan parvana* was just like the meeting of a man and woman in love and the resultant '*amrit*' (drops of sperm) was then placed in the betel leaves as *Pan Parvana* for her to swallow. After taking the *Parvana*, she told that she had placed Rs. 101/ (One hundred and one only) on to Haqnam's feet as the normally fixed fees (*Chadhawa*) of the rite. She however did not just narrate the rite, but also opened up before all those sitting there

the betel leaves that were containing the drops of sperm. Now the prevailing apprehensions of such practice by Haqnam was no more a heresy, but the bitter reality was now exposed before Sewa Das and his admirers sitting there; he instantly decided to abandon the place and he deserted Singhori forever.

Combining accounts of both Sewa Das and Dhyan Das, the latter being younger to the former just by 14 years, we get a very consistent description of the condition of the Kabirpanth, may be, in some instances, prejudiced to the *Vansh gaddi* functionaries, during the eighteenth century. Their accounts reflect on several issues that had adversely been affecting the *Dharmdasi* branch particularly in the central India and, in other parts, in general. The published manuscript also points out some of the shameful rites that had been taking deep roots in the Singhori ashram particularly under the headship of Haqnam. Helpless, Sewa Das and his 16 supporter disciples left Singhori math forever in 1813 (1869VS) and reached Nadiya along with the troupe of 16 *Sadhus finally* in 1814 .

### Bihar, Rajputana and the United Provinces

An early 18<sup>th</sup> century Kabir's centre famous as *Bagicha math* is said to have been founded at Rosara, situated in the present Samastipur district of Bihar. Bagicha math had initially emerged a sub-branch of the Dharamdasi *Vansh gaddi*, however, it had led the movement for opening an independent *Kharasiya nirwan/bind/nad* section of the *Dharmdasi* branch in 1934.<sup>27</sup> It has been a resourceful sub-branch of the *Dharmdasi* branch centred then at Kawardha. Some of the documents as provided to us by the Dharmdasi functionaries at Raipur, the residence of *Acharya Prakashnam*, suggest *Bagicha math's* inception during

the *gaddi* of Pramod Guru 'Balapir' in 1697, for the founder Mahant of the *Bagicha math* had been an associate of the former.<sup>28</sup> The successor Mahants till Kashi Das's time, had not severed their association until he was elected as the founder Mahant of the *Kharasiya math* in 1934. Before him, six Mahants are said to have honoured the seat of this math- Khedi Das, Prem Das, Khushiya Lal Das, Ishwari Das, Tulsi Das, and Govind Das. Similarly another tradition took off in the Fatuha of Fatehpur district, Uttar Pradesh under the humble guidance of Mita Das, who is said to have a disciple of one Beniram Das of Kanpur during this period. Parashuram Chaturvedi cites Mita Das to show latter's gratitude to Kabir in the following words- '*Jo Kashi Kahi Gaya Jolaha, so ta hai Taksari, Mita Taki sakhi det hain, wah Pahunche Darbari*'. Mita is said to have lived through eighteenth century and died at Narvirpur, presently part of district Unnao in Uttar Pradesh in 1768.<sup>29</sup> We can presently find a sizeable number of disciples following Mita's *panth* particularly in the districts of Fatehpur and Unnao, who sings simultaneously the *bhajans* credited to Kabir and Mita.

Din Darvesh, a Muslim by birth, was founder of another sect in parts of *Rajasthan*, who is also said to be inspired particularly by Kabir.<sup>30</sup> He was born in village Gudali situated near Udaypur in 1753. Its followings gradually came from the meeting points of the boundary areas of Gujarat, Uttar Pradesh and *Rajasthan*.

During this century another resourceful math came into existence at Dauliganj in Lucknow, the capital city of Uttar Pradesh.<sup>31</sup> This math is traditionally believed to be formed during the reign of Asifuddaula (1775-1797), the fourth *nawab* of Oudh *suba*. Asifuddaula was the fourth ruler of Oudh. Lucknow was declared as the capital of *Oudh* shortly before he had taken over



the throne. His reign had been more famous for consolidating the ties of the *Oudh nawabs* with the then *shia* rulers of Iran and Iraq. The Bibiyapur *Kothi* built by Asafuddaula was situated adjacent to the area where a Kabirpanth math gradually developed under the material support from him.

It is said of Asifuddaula that he donated the present premises of the Dauliganj Kabir math to begin with. Asifuddaula used to visit this part of *jungle* area for hunting, unaware of the fact that a *sadhu* named Man Sukh Das,<sup>32</sup> a devotee of Kabir, used to spend most of his time inside the *jungle* in meditation. When Nawab came to know of the *sadhu*, he decided to test his credentials. He sent for him, and his messengers brought the *sadhu* to *nawab's* court. The *nawab* is said to have requested the *sadhu* to show his healing power by curing his lone son from a chronic sickness. The *sadhu* is said to have offered the prince a permanent remedy from the ailment. The *nawab's* happiness knew no bounds; he immediately requested the *sadhu* to stay in the same area where he had been meditating for long.

It is said that the *nawab* earmarked around 100 acres of *jungle* area for the *sadhu* who then onwards decided to erect a centre of devotion for his increasing number of disciples.<sup>33</sup> It is said one of the queens of the *nawab* was so influenced by the *sadhu* that she asked her officials to raise a boundary around the donated land given to the *sadhu* so that future encroachment or unnecessary dispute could be checked. The Dauliganj *Kabir Mandir* is situated just opposite side of the Imambara that Asifuddaula had got built as a relief measure during his reign indicating the reverence Kabir's centre may have evoked in the former's heart. Presently the math is said to have been

succeeded by eight Mahants on the seat of its *guru* corroborating the related tradition of math's 250 years.

According to the version of math functionaries at Dauliganj, it had been an associated branch of Kabir Chaura, Banares since its foundation, as the founder Mahant, Mansukh Das, was a disciple of the Kabir Chaura. Mansukh was born in a village near Jaunpur about 20 kms from Banares. Jaunpur was later on renamed as Sultanpur district and had been closely linked to the ruling dynasty of the Oudh *Nawabs*. However, its association with the Kabir-Chaura is no more in existence. This math has for the last 50 years or so has delinked itself from the Kabir-Chaura branch and has assumed independence. Instead, its present religious Mahant, Shanti Das relates himself to the ideology of the Parakhpanthi Kabir math centred at Allahabad.<sup>34</sup>

## Orissa

In Bihar and Orissa region too, Kabirpanth came under the domain of aggressive invasions of the Marathas during the period. The headquarters of the Jagudasi branch centred in Cuttack is said to have in its wake, shifted to Bidupur in the Vaishali district of the present Bihar.<sup>35</sup> As has been described in the first chapter, we could not definitively figure out the location of this Jagudasi centre in Cuttack or in any other part of Orissa; however, the prevailing tradition among the followers of this branch apprises us that the shift of the branch in Bihar was executed by the eighth Mahant of the Cuttack headquarters. Ram Dayal Das, 85, the present *Acharya* of this branch has preserved the one page donation paper of 10 *kattha* land piece, written in *Kaithi* in 1735, which was given to Hathiram Das.<sup>36</sup> The local *zamindar* had offered this piece of land to him while was

wandering from one place to another in search of a suitable place to re-settle the Jagudasi centre after the Marathas had forced him and his close followers to vacate the Cuttack centre. He is said to have visited earlier centres of Jagudasi branch in Bihar such as Andhartharhi and Basatpur but he did not like to operate the headquarters from the seat of the sub branches. He rather went for a small but a fresh beginning of the headquarters from a new centre and seated himself at the centre he developed at Bidupur, a small *qasba* of the time.

The oral testimonials of the Maratha invasions taking place in parts of then Orissa find favour in scholarly works of historians too. Historical studies of K.K Datta and Jata Shankar Jha, Jadunath Sarkar and R.K Chaudhary,<sup>37</sup> to name a few among many others, have described in details the fury and ravages caused by the continual Maratha marauders during 1730s until their successful capture of the larger part of then Orissa by 1751. The situation of the Kabirpanth is said to have become more susceptible to the intense fury of the Marathas because of its anti-*Brahminical* stances. Hathiram Das is also said to have been getting extremely worried at the slow speed of the growth of the *panth* in then Orissa, exacerbated by the Marathas' incessant attacks.

Oral tradition prevailing in the sub-urban area of Cuttack called Chauliaganj apprises us that the Cuttack '*gaddi*' of Jagodas prospered in Orissa till the attack of Marathas on various parts of Orissa. Presently the Kabir centre built under the guidance of Jagodas is not known as a Kabirpanth centre but merely a *Samadhi* temple (*mandir*) under control of a *sagun* temple trust since the mid-eighteenth century.

According to the published version of the tradition associated with this *Samadhi* temple situated in the Chauliaganj area of Cuttack, the name of the *subedar* who had donated 110 *bigha* land to the then functionary of the math was Janaki Bhonsle. The published souvenir titled as *Kadambani in Oriya language*<sup>38</sup> also details the names of the *sadhus* whose *Samadhis* have been since been preserved are as follows: i. Haridas ii. Padm Charan Das iii. Bishnu charan Das iv. Ram Krishna Das v. Gopi Chandra Das, vi. Banmali Das, Vii. Chintamani Das. The accuracy of the names as detailed above do not conform to the names of the Mahants as enlisted by the previous scholars in their studies of the Jagodasi tradition and the *guru-pranali* available at the Bidupur *acharya gaddi* about the Cuttack branch. The single name that tallies with the name of the Jagodasi branch is that of Haridas who is placed as the immediate predecessor Mahant of Hathiramdas who abandoned Cuttack forever, whereas he is shown as the founder mahant of the *Samadhi* temple still existing there. Presently the math is left just with 10 acres of land lying adjacent to the temple complex.<sup>39</sup>

Immediate cause of the final closure of the Jagodasi centre in Cuttack was, according to the legend, the *sadhu's* reluctance to part with his cows whose milk had once cured the chronic disease of a Maratha ruler. Finding the *sadhu's* cow gifted with the healing power, the Maratha sardar tried to get hold of the mystical cow itself. The *sadhu* did not want to part with his favourite cow. Yet the *sardar* sent his musclemen to take away the cow and thus they grabbed the cow and brought her to the custody of the ailing Maratha leader but to no avail. The legend tells that the cow stopped giving milk at her new owner's place. The Maratha leader smelt some foul play in the cow's refusal to

give milk, and hence he called for the *sadhu* either to restore the cow's milking state, or to get ready for the punishment his failure was to follow. The *sadhu*, in the circumstance, decided to desert the centre instead of facing the ardent and humiliating treatment of the expanding Marathas in the region.<sup>40</sup>

Upon opening a new headquarters of the *Jagodasi* branch at Bidupur in present Bihar, Kabirpanth got an important centre of operation from Bihar, which began to supervise the whole number of the Jagodasi sub-branches then spread in various parts of the British India such as Punjab, United Provinces, Gorkha *raj* and the Central Provinces etc. The headquarters itself has since been succeeded by nine Mahants also called *Acharyas* of the Jagodasi branch till 1923, the year of the earliest printed genealogy of their Mahants.<sup>41</sup> The present Mahant, Ram Dayal Das, thirteenth in the order of succession, has been heading the Jagodasi *Acharya gaddi* since 1980.

The succession of 20 Mahants (including seven Mahants at Cuttack) leads us to believe that the Jagudasi branch has been active in parts of the eastern India at least since the early phase of the *panth*. The expanding Jagudasi branch could draw its followings in some parts of then Punjab presumably during the early years of the eighteenth century also. Its earliest centre in the Punjab region could develop in the old town of *Dera Bassi*<sup>42</sup> presently in the SAS Nagar district of Punjab.

## Punjab

The earliest reliable evidence, as collected by me till date, for the existence of a Kabirpanthi math in addition to those named after Garibdas in then Punjab comes from *Derabassi*, situated in the present SAS Nagar district, situated roughly 20 Kms. away from

Chandigarh towards Haryana.<sup>43</sup> The present Mahant of the math traces its origin to the generosity of a local *zamindar* who had donated the present houses of the math. The record contains details about landed assets measuring 50 *bighas* belonging to the math formed for the service of mankind in the name of Kabir. The antiquity of the present math can also be measured by the number of the *Samadhis* of the Mahants preserved inside the math complex, which are 11 in number excluding the number of Mahants who served and died after 1930. Although the *Guru-pranali* published by the present Mahant enlists the name of 22 Mahants of the Dearbassi math having succeeded till date, he himself suspects the genealogy. Yet he vouched for the succession of at least 13 Mahants including himself.

Around the same period, about 150 kms away from *Derabassi* towards Delhi, a distinct branch of the Kabirpanth was in the offing in the name of Garib Das, an eminent Kabir's disciple, at village Chhudani situated in the present Jhajhar (formerly part of Rohtak) district of present Haryana, forming part of then Punjab.<sup>44</sup> Although some of the heads of the mainstream Kabirpanth do not consider *Garibdasis* as the integral part of their *panth*, most of the *Garibdasi* disciples I met unitedly declared that they are *Garibdasi* Kabirpanthis, as there have been the *Dharmdasi*, *Jagodasi*, *Bhagodasi* or *Paltudasi Kabirapanthis* etc. He is said to be born at Chhudani in 1717 (VS 1774) and expired in 1778. A large number of the Kabirpanthis of the Punjab and Himachal Pradesh, and Jammu and Kashmir too consider Garibdasi followers an integral part of the Kabirpanth. Taking a cue from these disciples beliefs, I treat the Garibdasi establishment as an expansion of the Kabirpanth in the eastern part of the medieval Punjab. During Garib Das life-time itself,

Kabirpanth perhaps spread towards north-western part of Uttar Pradesh and several other parts of Punjab. One of the famous centres of devotion came into existence at Saharanpur, while Garibdas's messages were in particular spread by *Bhuriwale sahib* in and around Ludhiana and Mullapur. Some scholars<sup>45</sup> are of the view that present Rajasthan and Haryana had been the resorts of *Bairagi Sadhus*, *Nathpanthi Yogis* and Kabirpanthi saints. Kabir's message to this area was primarily spread by *Dadupanthi sants*. They exercised a tremendous influence on the people. Garib Das's predecessors were already devotees of Kabirpanth in the region wherein *Dadupanthi sants* too were constant visitors. From his earliest days of childhood Garib Das sought the company of saints. He kept away from home for long hours of the day and at times even showed signs of renouncing the world. Garib Das however took the teachings of Kabir to a new high in the Punjab region.

K.C. Gupta highlights the fact that the myth of Garib Das's *darshan* of Kabir as *Jinda Pir* or *guru* was reconstructed to emphasize the distinctive character of the Garib Das *panth* from the mainstream Kabirpanth. To quote him:

The disciples of Garib Das have built a legend around the spiritual meeting between *Garib Das* and Kabir. This has probably been done with the clear intention of building an independent school of thought. Garib Das wanted to connect the saint with Kabir but they did not wish to identify themselves with Kabirpanthis. So in order to dissociate themselves from all branches of Kabirpanthis,

they built a legend that the spiritual wisdom of Kabir was given to Garib Das by Kabir himself on a spiritual plane through an astral body.<sup>46</sup>

Although Garib Das himself was not an educated person, but his *vanis* were compiled by Gopal Das, a Dadupanth follower of the time. At Chhudani, Garib Das used to sit under a tree and dictate religious hymns and songs. Innumerable small compositions were written. People copied them and thus his writings spread from one hand to another. Various *sadhus* and many centres devoted to *Sant* Garib Das had copies of these works. His *padas* according to Dr. Ram Kumar Verma<sup>47</sup> exceeded 17000. It was however published as the *Garibdas ki Granth Sahib* first in 1924. According to K C Gupta's study, the ancestral home of Garib Das's father was a small village named Karontha situated at the distance of about 24 kms from Chhudani. He was born in a *Kshatriya Jat* family of Hardev Singh and his pious wife, Dayali Devi. Their son, Balram Singh was the father of Garib Das. Balram Singh was married at Chhudani. His father-in-law was a rich farmer named Shiv Lal, who offered the hand of his daughter, Rani, a single girl child, to Balram Singh. Having no one to look after his vast property, he perforce asked Balram to come to Chhudani and stay there. Balram's whole family thereafter shifted to Chhudani.

For nearly twelve years after his marriage, Balram Singh did not have any child, which worried both his father and father-in-law. They prayed to God for the gift of a son and sought the blessings of many saints. There came to Chhudani a *Siddha Yogi*, who camped in a small hut near a pond outside the village. Hearing about the remarkable spiritual powers of the *Siddha Yogi*, Balram Singh's father-in-law met him, made offerings of food and



clothes and begged him to bless Rani and pray for the birth of a son in her house. The story goes that the *Siddha* said: “Your daughter and son-in-law are not ordinary people. In their last birth, they performed great *tapasya*, as a result of which a great soul will be born in their house. He shall be the living image of Kabir.’<sup>48</sup>

### Sant Garib Das

We do not know much about the early education of Garib Das. A small village like Chhudani probably could not afford to give him much of a formal education. But by association with saints, *fakirs*, *Yogis* and *Dadupanthi* priests and perhaps even Sikh priests he appears to have learnt much about the religious literature of the *Bhaktas* of the medieval times. In his writings he acknowledges the influence of Kabir, Guru Nanak, Pipa, Ravidas and others. He also shows considerable knowledge of the *Bhagvatapurana* and the *Ramayana*. The *kathas* of these religious classics was generally performed in Chhuduni and Garib Das must have learnt much from them. During his adolescent age, he was fond of memorising religious songs of the *Sants* like Kabir, Guru Nanak and Dadu, and sang them in a very melodious strain. He even learnt about music and musical instruments from wandering singers. One *Yogi* is said to have given him a *Sarangi* as a gift and taught him some *Ragas*- Garib Das sang such melodious songs on that *Sarangi* that the people were charmed just as snakes are charmed by the snake-charmer.

It is not exactly known who initiated him into the Kabirpanthi ideals so deeply and profoundly that he identified himself completely with the spirit of Kabir. In his writings, Garib Das mentions Kabir as his *Satguru* and as his ideal. So deeply was he

attached to Kabir's ideas that he refers to Kabir and his life at many places. To cite a few:

Garib's soul is a bird which soars into *Stmya Mandal*; Garib has met Kabir, the *Satguru*, who has liberated him. <sup>49</sup>

Such a true *Guru* have I met on the shore of Surati, as is supreme among Saints. His name is Kabir. <sup>50</sup>

His writings leave no doubt that he acknowledges no other *Guru* except Kabir. There is a popular legend mentioning Kabir who met him in a religious trance and initiated him. In such a trance, he experienced the highest ecstasy. He attained oneness with Kabir, which has been recorded by his son Jait Ram also. It is this spiritual unity and affinity which Garib Das had with Kabir that made subsequent writers on him build up the myth that he was an *avatar* of Kabir.

As he grew, Garib Das got engaged to Mohini, daughter of Chowdhary Nyadar Singh of Baroaa, a village about 45 kms away from Chhudani on the road going from Rohtak to Sonipat. Mohini was a devoted wife who exercised a great influence by her piety and nobility on both her husband and her children. She gave birth to four sons and two daughters. The names of the four sons were: (1) Jait Ram, (2) Turti Ram, (3) Angad Rai (4) Asa Ram, The names of his two daughters, were (1) Dil Kaur and (2) Gyan Kaur. Jait Ram and Turti Ram were twin brothers and as Jait Ram was born first, he was always treated as the elder of the two. Like his Master, Kabir, Garib Das led a very contented and ideal householder's life in which his responsibilities as a householder did not disturb his religious life. His devotion and *Bhakti*

continued to be intense and sustained. His sons and daughters also were all very religious and did not upset his mission as a religious teacher.

H. A. Ross's report too supports the traditional history of Garib Das in that

Garib Das was from a well known family of *Dhankar Jats*, now resident in Chhudani, a village of *tahsil* Jhajjar, which had migrated shortly before his birth at Karauntha in Rohtak *tahsil*. When 23 years old, he wrote a book now known as '*Baba Garib Dasji ki Pustak*', or '*Garib Das ki granth Sahib*', which consists of some 7000 verses of the celebrated Kabir, followed by 17000 of his own. He died in *samvat* 1835 (1778 AD), and over his remains, a *Samadhi* was erected.<sup>51</sup>

Very little material is available on the journeys of Garib Das and his relations with the contemporary rulers. However, sketchy evidences indicate that he visited far-flung areas. Among these evidences, the most reliable have been the shrines commemorating his visits to these places. We find such shrines in Mathura and Saharanpur of Uttar Pradesh; and at Paonta Sahib in the present Himachal Pradesh.<sup>52</sup> He probably went to these places either on the invitation of some devotees or to keep away from political upheavals and turmoils that were taking place at Delhi which was only thirty miles from his native place. Oral tradition avers to his visit to Mathura. During this journey he may have visited Vrindavan, Benaras and Allahabad too. He actually gives such a picturesque description of Kabir's shrine in

Banaras that we easily tend to believe that he would have visited the place. We also have some indications of his travels to Delhi and Saharanpur. Perhaps during an extremely disturbed period of Nadir Shah's invasion, he visited Himachal and stayed at a place called Haripur, only three miles from Paonta Sahib. The historical temple, at this place, is still known as Garib Nath's *Mandir*.

Widening popularity of Garib Das is said to have brought him to Muhammad Shah's notice, and the emperor then sent one of his Hindu ministers to invite the Sant to the court. When the Emperor's envoy met *Sant* Garib Das, he said that, "Only two types of people go to the court. One, those who commit crimes and seek the pardon of the king, others are those who seek power and position through flattery. I do not belong to either of the two classes." Garib Das, however, refused to go to the court of the Mughal Emperor. When the Emperor came to know about it, he wrote a polite letter requesting Garib Das to oblige him just by one visit. Garib Das finally conceded to emperor's request. He went to Delhi and stayed with *Sant* Charan Das<sup>54</sup> who not only entertained him but offered him an *Angarakha* as a gift which is still preserved at Chhudani. (Annexure-49)

When Garib Das met the Muhammad Shah, the Mughal ruler was very much impressed by the Sant's simplicity and nobility. The sermon which *Sant* Garib Das delivered had great effect on him. The Emperor then sought his blessings and begged for the stability of his kingdom. Garib Das then put forward three preconditions in order to reassure the longevity and stability of the Mughal empire: i. He must ban cow-slaughter. 2. He must keep only his legal wives and release all other women from the

bondage of the *harem*. 3. He should not levy any tax on foodgrains.

If at all Garib Das met any emperor, it is was, in all probability, Mohammed Shah alone.<sup>53</sup> But too many legends and unbelievable stories have been added to the outcome of the meeting. It is quite natural in that Garib Das as a saintly personality would have asked the emperor to be compassionate and kind to all communities, and then appealed to the emperor's good sense to become a vegetarian. He also counted the benefits of vegetarianism before Muhammad Shah in that all the ills of his state would come to an end; however he would be able to triumph over many countries even through the *Ahimsa marg*. Garib Das's insistence on vegetarianism and non-violence very much conformed to the traditional adherence of the Kabirpanthis to these principles. The subsequent closeness of Garib Das with Muhammad Shah is, in fact, said to have caused heartburns in a number of irreconcilable courtiers.

Muhammed Shah might have agreed to him on a few counts; however, Garib Das was aware that Emperor's decision was often mediated through the courtiers. The *Qazis* were enraged at the thought of a ban on cow-slaughter. Fearing that Garib Das may influence the Emperor in the wrong direction they persuaded Muhammed Shah to sign orders for his imprisonment, Garib Das is said to have then cursed the Mughal Emperor and escaped miraculously from the prison. A year later Nadir Shah invaded and Muhammed Shah's reign gradually began to collapse. A famine is said to have raged in the country causing severe scarcity of food. To tide over the hardships of the famine, one of his disciples, Santosh Das is said to have sent a bullock-cart, full of barley, to Garib Das, to feed the hungry lot of

Chhudani, but some robbers waylaid it. The leader of the robbers imprisoned Garib Das too. He could be freed only after the intervention and persuasion of his local disciples, who rushed in and secured his release. Five days after this incident, it is further said, some unknown assailants attacked this leader of the robbers, and cut off his hands. He then approached Garib Das for forgiveness. He finally forgave the robber who surrendered and turned into a disciple of Garib Das for ever.

There appears to be no truth in the legend stated in his biography by Bhagat Ram that the Nahan State was established by the blessings of Garib Das. Garib Das may have visited the state and would have found honour there, Guru Govind Singh is also said to have visited the place as the guest of Nahan *Maharaja*.

Like Kabir, Garib Das's birth and childhood abounds in several legends.<sup>55</sup> A legend states that as a child he began to play as soon as he was born, which was a big surprise for the parents. Then the child disappeared for some time and when they prayed he again appeared as a natural child. They realised that what they saw was some vision, the significance of which they could not understand. Another legend says that three months before the birth of this child, when one day Rani was going to the well to fetch some water, two Saints came near her and touched her feet. Astonished, when she asked them why they had treated her like that, the Sants said that they had actually paid homage to the great soul who was to be born in her house. The child was named Garib Das after performing the religious rites. When he grew up, his playmates and parents addressed him simply as Gariba. He loved to play with the children such games as showed the religious tendencies of the child from the early years. At

times he would sit on a raised platform like a *Guru* and deliver a sermon, preaching: “Do not steel, do not abuse; speak the truth; respect your parents.”

At the age of five, while he was playing with boys, a play-mate’s little finger was seriously injured by a stone edge flung towards him by Garib Das. The finger began to bleed and the boy began to cry. Garib Das caught hold of his finger and asked the boy to look towards the sky. In another minute, he assured the boy that a star from the sky would come down and start shining in his hand. Anticipating such a miracle, the boy looked at the sky, while Garib Das bandaged him. It is said that the wound was healed as soon as bleeding stopped, and the legend further states that a star was constantly shining in the boy’s hand.

According to another popular legend, there were some *Ramanandi Bairagis* residing in Chhudani. Once their huts caught fire and it was feared that the fire would spread throughout the village. Garib Das jumped into the hut that was half burnt. Everyone thought that he would be consumed by fire. But soon the fire died down and the village was saved from being destroyed. Garib Das came out safe and sound from the hut.

In another episode, domesticated cows of Garib Das strayed into the barley fields of a farmer and destroyed the crops. The farmer reported to the Nawab but when it was checked up it was found that the barley field was intact. This story, probably lifted from the life of Guru Nanak, is found in some of his later biographies to show the miraculous powers of the *Sant* during his early years. On another occasion, while Garib Das was grazing cows in the forest, a tiger appeared on the scene. The cows were frightened. Garib Das stood there fearlessly and encouraged by the fearlessness of their Master, the cows grouped themselves in a

circle and stood ready to fight the tiger with their horns pointed towards the latter. The tiger moved away and a later legend says that when Garib Das commanded the tiger to go to some other forest the tiger went away leaving the cows unmolested.

Garib Das was hardly ten or twelve when he went to meet his aunt (*Rani's* sister) at Khedanagar. His cousin, named Asanand took him to a *Ramanandi Sant* named Baudhidas. Baudhidas asked Garib Das whether he had been initiated into spiritual teachings by any *Guru*. Garib Das said that he had not adopted any one as his *Guru*. Baudhi Das' disciple, Yogidas, then urged Garib Das to accept his Master as his *Guru*, and wear the *tilak and kanthi*. He also spoke about *thakur-puja* and going to pilgrimages and encouraged those ideas in the name of Ramananda which Garib Das had given up during his own life-time. Garib Das's mind was already radicalised under the influence of Kabir and Dadu's teachings. He revolted against *Karmkanda* saying: 'Rituals are lower practices, I will adopt him as *Guru* who is absorbed in the Name of God.'

Since his childhood, he is said to have also revolted against idolatry. He refused to pay any homage to any idol of the Hindu temples even in a formal way. He also did not believe that going on pilgrimages was a means of salvation as Kabir has taught in his *sakhis*.

There are some anecdotes that relate to Garib Das's meetings with some Kabirpanthi followers as well. To cite a few, Mansa Ram, a disciple of Kabir was performing *tapasya* in the hills near Almora.<sup>56</sup> He told his disciple, Handi Bhadhanga, that Kabir was born as Garib Das in a small village named Chhudani. Handi came to the village to find out the truth about it. He stayed near Garib Das for some days and after many discourses, some of which are



recorded by subsequent writers, reached the conclusion that Garib Das was really the *avatar* of Kabir.

According to another anecdote, two famous disciples of Kabir, Arjan and Surjan, lived upto the time of Garib Das. Kabir had told them that 'they would be liberated when he came to the earth again as Garib Das. They came on a bullock cart to Chhudani and on meeting Garib Das gave up their bodies'. They felt blessed after meeting their Satguru Kabir in Garib Das again.

Garib Das, according to Mohan Singh,<sup>57</sup> may be considered as the last of the *Hindu Raj Yogis* and *Bhakta* poets, who had a great mastery over popular poetic language and style as Ghulam Farid had, but whose knowledge of other Indian languages was greater than that of any other poet of medieval India. The lone poet who comes near to him was Shah Qayam Din Chisti of Kari Goan in Bombay.

### Deccan and Marathawada

A number of Kabirpanth's maths were coming up in parts of the Central and Western India. One of the earliest Kabir centre in Gujarat appears to have been formed at Saankari Siri, Raipur Chakala, Ahmedabad at the turn of the eighteenth century.<sup>58</sup> Presently the math establishment does not have any textual evidence with them to establish its antiquity, but the high number of successive Mahants, as per the genealogy of the Mahants, has been indicative of its continuous existence for the last 300 years. The genealogy contains the name of 20 Mahants who have had served this centre excluding the ongoing Mahant Gyani Das. According to the tradition the name of the founder Mahant at Saankari Siri was Amardas.

In the Central India, another sub-branch came up in Surat presumably towards the end of the eighteenth century. It was opened at Lal Darwaza of the town. Tradition has it that it has been a *Dharmdasi* sub-branch of the Kabirpanth. Till date, the twelve Mahants<sup>59</sup> have had served this math. Kedarnath Dvivedi,<sup>60</sup> who had met Mahant Thakur Das, the then Mahant of the *Lal Darwaza* math, writes that Moti Das was the founder Mahant of this centre. However the inscribed list on the wall of the *Satsang hall* of the ashram enlists him as the eighth Mahant, a fact needs further probing in order to establish its oldness. Interestingly enough, the erstwhile Mahant, Jagdish Das, shows his affiliation with the *Dharmdasi Vansh Gaddi* of Damakhera, while the *de facto* Mahant, Jagdish Das, who is his son, relates himself to the *Dharmdasi Kharasiya nirvana* branch.

A resourceful centre of devotion for the Kabirpanth emerged in Jamnagar, presently situated in Gujarat. According to the prevailing tradition and the available evidence, this centre was initiated by Khem Das during the time of the *Dharmdasi Acharya*, Amolnam.<sup>61</sup> The *Kabir Ashram* of Jamnagar, its popular name among followers, is established in 18th century, from that time the *Ashram* is involved in the preaching of the message of *Sadguru Kabir Saheb*. The first Mahant *Saheb* was Shree Khemdasji. Second in line was *Shree* Mahant Nirbhaydas *Saheb* who became head of this *Ashram* in 1779. Shree Mahant Jeevan Dasji *Maharaj Saheb* was honored as the third Mahant in 1799 at his early age of 27 year. He served as the Mahant of this *Ashram* till his death. His *Samadhi* is still well preserved inside a room of the math.

To our informants,<sup>62</sup> he was one of the eminent disciples of Amolnam, and in course of one of his religious tours towards

Dwarka region, Khem Das happened to pass through Jamnagar as well. He decided to stay overnight there, but did not find a better place than a dilapidated fort which was notorious as the den of ghosts and witches. The related legend states that Khem Das overnight stay in the desolate fort instantly became a matter of anxiety for all those who heard of it. Apprehensive of the similar ill-fate of the visitor like all the previous visitors who were often left dead, some people rushed to the *raja* of Jamnagar expressing their concern for the *sadhu's* safety. When *raja's* personnel went up to see the fate of the unknown visitor, they found, to their great amazement that the visiting *sadhu* was lost in meditation without any fear and worry. They hastily returned to the *raja's* palace and passed on the astonishing news to the *raja* who himself went up to greet such a *sadhu*. Khem Das, the visiting *sadhu*, then onwards was persuaded by the *raja* himself to stay in Jamnagar permanently. Khem Das is said to have finally conceded to the *raja's* request as it had wide back-up from the common mass too.

## Bihar

We also have a detailed account of the Kabirpanth of the mid-eighteenth century, written by a Christian missionary-cum-scholar named Marco della Tomba, then living in north-west Bihar. His account is the earliest reliable description of the Kabirpanth by a European scholar. He was deputed here as a *Padre*. Padre Marco della Tomba was, in fact, an Italian Capuchin monk. He stayed in India in between 1757 and 1803, when he died. Marco had travelled in various parts of north India, Nepal and Tibet, but spent most of his years at Bettiah, the headquarters of east Champaran district, close to the present Indo-Nepal

border.<sup>63</sup> He studied a number of religious traditions including '*Cabiristi*' which appears to be another derisive Sanskritized term, often found to be used by the hostile *Brahmanical pandits*. Although he noted Kabirpanth as a Hindu (*Gentile*) religious sect, he found *Cabiristi* (Kabirpanth) to be a distinct religious group among many others.

He pointed out that Kabir's ideas, as prevalent among his followers, were fundamentally Buddhist, and that his rejection of caste, scripture, Brahmanical practices and rituals had their origin in Buddhism. It is here noteworthy from a historical point of view that it had been primarily the two factors of credibility and the number of Kabir's following which inspired him, as he writes, to dwell on the *Cabiristi* in details. He further noticed that these disciples were *secolari* (married), wore a particular rosary (*mala*) made of small beads, were strict vegetarians and believed in the practice of *ahimsa* (non-violence), taking care not to crush insects etc. According to Marco, they believed in 'no god in particular', the supreme Deity being for them, an impersonal force at work in the universe. Nevertheless they recognized a visible god called *Naraen* (*Narayan*), and another one whom they call *Niranjen* (*Niranjan*), and who is the instrument through which the great eight-armed *Bavani* (*Bhavani*) goddess plays the main part.

He also attempted to locate the time of Kabir and came out with his unqualified conclusion of Kabir being the spiritual master of Alexander the Great. To quote Marco della Tomba himself-<sup>64</sup>

Among the books I read with my Brahmin friend from Benares were two books regarded as particularly sacred by the *Kabir Panthis*, the followers of a curious Hindu sect Known as the

*Kabir Panth*. These two books were the *Mulpanji*, or Register of the Root, and the *Gyan-Sagar*, or Ocean of Wisdom. In 1762, I wrote out interlineal translations of these two books into Italian, giving the original text and translation side by side. These translations I sent to Monsignor Borgia in Rome so that scholars in Europe could also study them. During my years in Bettiah I got to know many of these *Kabir Panthis* and learned much about their beliefs and practices.

Elaborating the prevailing history and tradition of the Cabirishti, Tomba further describes—paanthesis the highlighted portion

The followers of these sects regard Kabir as a great saint and miracle worker. They say that he was the spiritual master of Alexander the Great. About this sect I could say a great deal, because they are in great esteem and number.[...]

Marco also provide us details on the prevailing symbolic order of the Kabirpanth during the period:

The *Kabir Panthis fakirs* are secular. They wear a necklace of small bead of wood, this being their distinctive mark, and some other symbols drawn on their foreheads. They eat neither

meat nor fish, being rigorous followers of the opinion that all animals belong to the same species. For this reason, they do not even kill their lice and take care not to step on the ants in their path, etc. They have permission to eat greens and pulses, in spite of the fact that these plants bear fruits, because, they say need supersedes rules.

They do not believe in particular god, but argue that God is nothing other than the power (*Ia Virtu*) that produces all things of the world. In order to prove this principle, they are obliged to say abominable things. When they make their profession of faith, they swear to retain their semen (in *materiam decidentem*) and keep it in hand, promising not to release it, and, if released, to eat it . They have, however, wives and children. This type of *fakir* is not insolent. [...]

Their visible God is a certain *Narayan*. In addition, there is another named *Niranjan*, who is the instrument by means of which this God wished to create the world. But *Niranjan*, not finding himself capable of doing this, requested (as the book the *Mul-panji* says), as a favor from *Narayan* or God, one of of His 16 sons. God granted him one of these 16 sons

named *Kurma*. God ordered *Kurma* to give to *Niranjan* the egg to create the world. This *Kurma* had four heads, and his body measured 16 palang (a palang is 90 Italian miles). *Niranjan* himself measured 9 palang. Before they came to an agreement, they waged a great battle between themselves and *Niranjan* cut off three of *Kurma's* heads. Then with these three heads he formed the five elements , namely the four elements plus the void. With these elements he then created all the rest of the things of this world. During their combat, *Niranjan* sweated a great deal and with his sweat he formed the ocean and the fish; and with other drops of sweat he formed the other 94 crores [of things ] of this earth , etc. He made the sun and the moon and the 900,000 stars. All these things are of the essence of God himself since they originated from the three heads of *Kurma*, the son of God. [...]

Having done this, *Niranjan* remained there thinking, not knowing how to populate the three worlds, that is, heaven, earth and hell. Then he went to God and performed penance for 768 years. God told him to go to Mansarovar, where he would find a virgin with eight arms, whose names were the internal

Bhavani. This virgin contained in herself the root of 84 laks souls (1 lakh is 100,000), from which creatures of different sorts would be produced. For this purpose, Niranjan went there and saw the virgin. Featuring that they would lose her, he swallowed her alive. God became angry because of this and punished Niranjan, forcing him to eat 125,000 souls every day for as long as the world endures, and decreed that even then he would not be satisfied.

Then God, being inclined against Niranjan, agreed to a request by Kurma who demanded vengeance for the loss of his three heads and created a certain Jogajit to go and kill Niranjan. They fought a great battle, but kurma threw *Nirajan* down and removed the swallowed virgin, Bhavani, from his belly. Afterward Niranjan meditated seriously on his deeds, and from his thoughts arose *Kal*, the king of death. This sect of *Kabir Panthis* does not establish monasteries. This *Kabir Panthis* are rather like secular persons.<sup>65</sup>

Marco della Tomba, who provides the earliest reliable evidence for the Kabirpanth, has left behind details of the Kabirpanth including several other sects of North India for the period during which he had very few written and reliable sources to verify. In



fact his writings relied more on the prevailing traditions about the concerned Hindu sects which were potentially alluring from the conversion point of view. We also need to underline the fact that his observations of these Hindu sects might have been influenced by the dwindling fate of the missionaries which in coming days, in turn, was to be decided by the consolidation of the British colonial rule in India.

David N. Lorenzen<sup>66</sup> rightly points out that the *Kabir Panth*, in fact, includes both *sadhus* (i.e., ascetics or *fakirs*), who are celibate, and *bhagats* (lay persons), who can marry. The *Kabirpanthi sadhus* do have monasteries (against what Marco claims). Marco is apparently confusing the two categories since he claims above that the Kabirpanthi “*fakirs*” marry and have children. Although the retention of semen plays an important role in *yoga*, Marco’s claim about Kabirpanthi practices in this regard have not been noted by any other observer as yet. However, I myself have heard of such *yogic* practices followed by some Kabir followers as well.<sup>67</sup>

The foregoing accounts lead us to believe that while eighteenth century saw expanding trend for the *panth*, it also came to face challenges of different types both from within and without. The most troublesome challenge had been the Maratha invaders active all through from Central Provinces to Orissa. Apart from hostile political forces, ideological differences pertaining to the management of the *panth’s* increasing properties, took a large toll on the future growth of the Kabirpanth. Most of the earliest maths presently known as the *Acharya Gaddis* met with internal feuds which tended to confine their role primarily in the institutional management at the cost of Kabir’s socio-religious teachings for the humanity.

## Footnotes

1. Shukdev Singh, *Sant Kabir aur Bhagatahi Shakha*, Vishwavidyalay Prakashan, Varanasi, 1997, p.26
2. Rarhia math still exists and is a resourceful math and was noted by F E Keay during the early 20<sup>th</sup> century, *Kabir and His Followers*, Satguru Publications, Delhi, 1996 (1931), p.105. He mentions it as Larhia.
3. The foundation of the Basdilla math also owes a lot to the local *raja* who had donated it profusely. It is said that Mahant too had close link with the Dhanauti math functionaries.
4. Kokil Das is positioned at 11<sup>th</sup> in the genealogy of Mahants having succeeded at the Kabir Chaura.
5. For the history of Kashi kingdom, I have relied on the scholarly works of C.A. Bayly, *Rulers, Townsmen and Bazaar: North Indian Society in the Age of Expansion, 1770-1870*, Cambridge University Press, Cambridge, 1997.
6. Balwant Singh's reign has been well-known to the students of modern India due to his bitter relation with Warren Hastings.
7. In fact, the elder queen was having no child in their long marital life, hence Chet Singh had married once more time. But it happened that the elder queen also gave birth

to a child immediately after the birth of a baby from the younger queen.

8. *Tekari raj* had been one of the famous estate in the then south Bihar. One can see its prosperous history in the works of R.R.Diwakar, *Bihar Through Ages*, Government Press, Patna, 1959; Anand A. Yang, *Bazaar India: Market, Society and Colonial State in Bihar*, University of California Press, Berkeley, 1999.
9. Bhagwan Dev Divedi belonged to the Brahmin caste of Gaya. Both the *rajs* of Kashi and Tekari had also been famous as the seats of the *Bhumihar-Brahmin* rulers in Bihar. The present Mahant of the Kabir math, Gaya interviewed, 13 Feb. 2015 (Annexure-41, 42).
10. *Panchgranthi* is said to have been originally written by Ram Rahas, but its authorship seems to have been later claimed by two more *sants*- Gurdayal Das of Kabir math, Fatuha, and Kunjal Das, the Mahant of Pavapuri, Bihar. I visited and interviewed then Mahant of Kabir math Pavapuri, 14 Feb, 2015.
11. *Basti Gazetteer* quoted in G.H. Westcott, *Kabir and the Kabir Panth*, Munshiram Manoharlal, New Delhi, 1986, p.57.
12. Rajendra Prasad, *Kabirpanth ka Udbhav aur Prasar*, Kabir Dharm Nagar, Damakhera, 1999 (1981), p.54.
13. The Maratha invasions in several parts of the British India were dominant feature of the eighteenth century and

these invasions finally led to the Anglo-Maratha wars; and this is a well known historical fact for the students of history in India. Invasion and capture of Ratanpur by the Marathas are well described in Saurabh Dube's *Untouchable Past: Religion, Identity and Power among A Central Indian Community 1780-1950*, State University of New York Press, Albany, 1988, pp.27-28.

14. Ibid, pp. 57-58.
15. Haihaya dynasty's rule over the Raipur kingdom is described in *Imperial Gazetteers of India*, Vol.X, Clarendon Press, Oxford, 1908, p.99.
16. His *Samadhi* is still preserved there but is in a dilapidated condition. Uday, PF, had conducted field work in this region from 6-9 Nov. 2013 (Annexure-42).
17. Uday interviewed Dushyant, 28 Jan. 2014
18. Rajendra Prasad, op.cit., p.20
19. I have taken this date from the contemporary account of Sewa Das as stated in *Nadvansh Ka Sankshipt Itihas*, Hindi, Mangal Das, Nadiya, 1996, pp.68-72. Following account is largely based on this book and the oral tradition collected by my PF (Annexure-43).
20. Rajendra Prasad, op.cit, p. 49
21. Ibid, p.50
22. Two cases of fraud and theft against Sewa Das and his associates are described in the *Nad vansh ka Itihas* and,

in both these cases lodged in the Raipur *thana*, Sewa is shown to have bailed out by *Dudhahari Maharaj* who had then been the head of the presently famous *Ramanandi Math* at Raipur city.

23. *Mahesh Das (ed.), Nadvansh Ka Sankshipt Itihas, op.cit.* Nadiya, 1996, p. 79.
24. J.D. Cunningham, *History of the Sikhs, From the Origin of the Nation to the Battles of the Sutlej*, Rupa Publications, New Delhi, 2002 (1849), pp.167-168. Also see, Saurabh Dube, *op.cit.*, pp. 89-90.
25. Mahesh Das (ed.), *op. cit.* p.5
26. *Ibid*,p. 78
27. *Ibid*, p. 81
28. This dissociation relates to the latest split of the *Dharmdasi Vansh* in 1934, as the then Mahant of the *Bagicha math*, Kashi Das had actually played a major role in the success of the split. I describe account of this split in my forthcoming book.
29. Rajendra Prasad,*op.cit.*, p. 53
30. Unnao emerged a very strong centre of the Kabirpanthis during the nineteenth century from where a sizeable number of followers migrated to Kanpur, one of the growing industrial towns of the British India, and collectively contributed in the opening the Kabir centre there also. I describe the process in my forthcoming book.

31. Din Darvesh, is related to Kabir in the same way as Dada Miyan, whose *mazar* and tradition links him to Kabir. Dada Miyan is said to have been the son of Kabir and his Mazar is worshipped both by Hindus and Muslims at Fatehpur in the Barabanki district of the present Uttar Pradesh. To the Muslims followers of both these medieval *faqirs*, Kabir was also a *sufi*, and both Din Darvesh and Dada Miyan owe their legacy to Kabir in their respective regions. I conducted field trip in and around Fatehpur 30 Dec., 2014.
32. Following details about the Dauliganj math, Lucknow, are entirely based on our field data, collected by myself and my PF, on 15 March, 2015 and Uday on 28 March 2014 (Annexure-44 a,b,c,d).
33. Mansukh is believed to have been born in Jaunpur district of Uttar Pradesh, the region which had already centres of devotion of a number of Kabir's followers, such as Barabanki, Jaunpur
34. The number of followers however appears to be very limited, may be because most of his followings came from the village areas where its sub-branches still exist. The founder Mahant's name has still been recalled as a legendary personality among the followers of the *panth* to whom we met.
35. Shanti Das, 70, interviewed, by us on two different occasions by me and Uday.

36. Oral tradition as collected by me has been the main source of the following description.
37. I owe special thanks to Acharya Ram Dayal Das as he had to take out the manuscript from a glass frame in which it was preserved, and got it Xeroxed for my research purposes. Please see the *Kaithi* manuscript of the donation paper as (Annexure-45).
38. I could personally consult in details the works of these historians alone, as Mithila region has been more familiar with me both socially as well as academically; for details, see, R.K.Chaudhary, *History of Bihar*, Motilal Banarsidas, Patna, 1958; K.K. Datta, *India's Social Life and Economic Condition in the 18<sup>th</sup> Century, 1703-1813*, Manohar, New Delhi, 1969; Datta, K.K and Jha, J.S (eds.), *Comprehensive History of Bihar*, Vol-II, K.P. Jayaswal Institute, Patna, 1976.
39. I was offered this copy of souvenir by Sri B.Patra, son of Late Damodar Patra, who is presently secretary of the trust of the Samadhi mandir, in *Math Patar*, Chauliaganj, Cuttack. He was initially unable to find its copy, yet after 6 months, after repeated reminders from my side, he managed to arrange a copy and sent it to me by the Indian posts services in Oct. 2014, (Annexure-46).
40. My statement is based on my interview of the Secretary of the Trust of the *Samadhi Mandir*, 27 Dec. 2013.

41. I got a published copy of the *guru-pranali Jago shakha*, Hindi, 1923, from Ram Dayal Das, the Acharya of the Jagodasi branch, 17 Oct, 2013 (Annexure-47 a,b,c).
42. Derabassi has derived its name presumably from the *Ashram (dera)* of Kabir which is the oldest among all the religious *deras* in the town. I visited this *ashram* three times in between 2013 and 2014. The following details are based on my field data and a booklet titled *Sewak Siksha*, (ed.Guru Dayal Das Shastri), 1978, based on 1930s manuscript. Rajender Singh, PF had also interviewed Mahant Gurdayal Das, Mandi, Himachal Pradesh, where he has developed three Kabir temples, 9 June 2013 (Annexure-48 a,b,c).
43. Haryana was carved out of the Punjab through the Panjab Reorganization Act in 1966 enacted by the Indian Parliament.
44. Jhajhar was part of the Rohtak district during British rule. Most of the details are based on field data collected by Rajendra Singh, first Project fellow in and around Chhudani and Karontha in May 2013. Karontha and its nearby area emerged as a strong centre of the *Arya Samaj* activists. Present controversial *guru* Rampal was earlier an associate of the Chhudani seat of the *Garibdasis*, however he later shifted to Karontha where he had bloody collision with the *Arya samaji* activists. We must note that Rampal is a self-proclaimed Kabirpanthi *guru* presently in jail for the last one year or so.



45. Dadupanth's history and its expansion in the nearby regions has recently been studied by Pemaram, *Madhykalin Rajasthan mein Dharmik Andolan*, Hindi, Rajasthani Granthagar, Jodhpur, 1977, pp. 115-142.
46. K. C. Gupta, *Sri Garib Das, Haryana's Saints of Humanity*, Impex India, 1976, p. 39. The author, K.C. Gupta, was attracted towards Garib Das when he attended some *satsangas* in the company of his father who was a great devotee of the *sant*. His literary interest in the writings of Garib Das was aroused after he had passed his M.A. in Punjabi from the Punjab University in the year 1951.
47. Ram Kumar Verma, *Hindi Sahitya Ka Alochnatmak Itihas*, (Hindi) Ramnarayan Lal Beni Madhav, Allahabad, 1971, pp. 294-295.
48. Yogeshwar, interviewed, Karontha, 12 May, 2013
49. *Garib Das ki Granth Sahib*, Sri Ram Nekatan Trust, Bhupatwala, Haridwar, 1964 (1924), p. 5.
50. Ibid, 17
51. H. A. Ross, *Glossary of the Tribes and Castes of the Punjab and North West Frontier Province*, Vol.II, Language Deptt. Punjab, Patiala, 1989 (1883) p. 841
52. Rajendra Singh, PF, visited *Garib Das ki Chhatari* in Saharanpur, 16 May 2013; I myself conducted Paonta Sahib shrine of Garib Das on 7 Oct.2013. This Chhatari represents the place, according to a myth, where Garib Das had reappeared after his *Samadhi* (death).

53. Mohammad Shah 'Rangeela', the Mughal emperor of Hindustan ruled from 1719-1748.
54. Charan Das is believed to be another saintly personality who was highly inspired by Kabir; his followers are however known as the *Charandasis* in the surroundings of Delhi region.
55. These legends are noted by Project Fellows of my project during field works in Haryana and Punjab.
56. The legend of Kabir's followers coming particularly from Almora does also indicate that the panth by eighteenth century had spread towards the region from where Bhagwandas, an immediate disciple of Kabir, had initially God converted.
57. Mohan Singh, *Kabir: His Biography, Kabir and the Bhagti Movement*, Vol.I, Atma Ram and Sons, Lahore, 1934, p.139
58. Description of the Ahmedabad math is entirely based on the field data collected by Uday, who visited Ahmedabad, 31 Jan. 2014 (Annexure 50 a,b,c).
59. Uday visited Surat, Gujarat, and collected field-data about almost all the Kabir maths in the city.
60. Kedarnath Dvivedi, op.cit., 176.
61. Rajendra Prasad, *Ashirvad Shatavadi Granth*, p. 57 (Annexure-49 49 a and b).

62. I had visited Jamnagar and interviewed a group of *sadhus*, mostly belonging to Gujarat itself, Oct. 2012
63. This area is famous more as Champaran of Gandhi's first experiment of the *Satyagrah* as his tool of political protest during the British rule in India. The life sketch of Tomba can be read in details in David N. Lorenzen's *The Scourge of the Mission, Marco della Tomba in Hindustan*, Yoda Press, New Delhi, 2010, pp. 78-79.
64. What several *Kabirpanthis* claim that Kabir met with the Indo-Afgan sultan named Sikander (Alexander) Lodi, seems to be mistaken by Marco della Tomba and thereafter a scores of European scholars, such as H.H.Wilson in locating Kabir during the time of Alexander the Great and Buddha. The region still constitutes major part of the Bhagatai maths wherein these were also gaining in resources too during the same period.
65. David N Lorenzen, op.cit., 2006, p.78.
66. Lorenzen, 'Marco della Tomba' in Monika Horstmann, (ed.), *Images of Kabir*, Manohar, New Delhi, 2002, p.33-43
67. I have met some Kabirpanthi sadhus who had been famous for their control over sexual instincts, such as; Abhilash Das, the founder of *Parakhpanthi* centre of the *panth* at Pritam Nagar, Allahabad; Munshi sahib of Pakhrauni math, Sitamarhi district and so on so forth.

## Conclusion

Kabirpanth, being a generic name of a discrete group of socio-religious followers, have been in existence since the sixteenth century, the period which had been a witness to the cascading effects of Kabir's unorthodox radical views as recorded in the contemporary chronicles of Abdul Haqa, Abul Fazl and those of Nabhadas in Persian and Hindi respectively . As has commonly been found in the formation of a radical movement worldwide, the Kabirpanth as a *nirgun* devotional way of salvation, had not got currency before his death in 1518, primarily because Kabir, an iconoclast of the purest order, himself may not have permitted it to be organized into a monolithic religious order until his death, as throughout his life he kept exhorting on the non-sectarian nature of religio-spiritual phenomena. Even as the order which came into existence after his name, is still far short of a neatly organized religious order, instead has taken on the character of a loose confederation of devotees, developed over a long stretched period of time in the following last centuries. More significantly, we must note that the panthic tradition, Kabirpanth being a part of it, has not yet taken off; instead, Kabir is accredited, by a number of scholars, to have sowed the seeds of such traditions. Yet Kabir's teachings (*vanis*) had definitely come to occupy place in the hearts of a substantial number of contemporary audiences of his time. This study definitely demonstrates the medieval form of the emerging *panth*, which

finally seems to have come of age during the post-eighteenth century India.

The study of the emerging centres of devotion coming up during the sixteenth century, as described in this work, persuade us to believe that Kabir's following had its spread over almost all parts of the north and central India, which were then politically divided into various *subas/parganas* of the pre-Mughal time. These followers definitely came from the two main organized religions-Hindu and Islam, as evident in the legends relating to Kabir, and the subsequent formation of extant Kabir Mazar and Samadhi at Magahar in the present Uttar Pradesh. The *Mazahar* documents written in Persian language, found at the Satmalpur Kabir math of Bihar, mentioning Akbar's generosity to the cause of the *faqir-e-Kabir*; and another revenue documents reconfirming the land donation made by Aurangzeb to the Kabir Mazar during the seventeenth century also makes it clear that the Mughal administrators in general had not been hostile to the nascent Kabir centres and his disciples, coming both from the Hindu and Muslim communities.

Moreover, we cannot just see these centres as markers of the growth of the devotional centres alone, these also betrayed the increasing number and widening area of Kabir's devotees or admirer/supporters in the region. During his life time, said to have spanned over 120 years, the places where Kabir had stayed for a substantial period; such as, Jagannathpuri Kashi, Magahar in the eastern India; Bandhogarh, Kabir Vad, Pushkar, in the central and western India respectively, parts of the medieval Punjab in the northern India, to cite a few of these, had been the main areas of emerging centres of devotion being opened, as it

has been happening in the case of similar other *bhakti* religious orders across the country in the period.

At the same time, it also becomes clear that the core of Kabir's non-sectarian teachings and his equi-distance from organized religions of the medieval Hindustan, began to be questioned by his own devotees as soon as he died, who had presumably dissolved their distinct Hindu/Muslim identity under his super-human personality. The ensuing acrimony between the recalcitrant groups of followers, however, seems to have been covered up by his sharp devotees in the mythic form, depicting his dead body as having been transformed into two flowers in the face of an inciting tense situation-each one flower separately taken by his hardcore Hindu and Muslim followers- to preserve it in the form of a Mazar as well as a Samadhi, the latter popularly called Kabir Samadhi within a single complex.

The seed of the erosion of the hitherto non-sectarian followings of the Kabir had already thus been sown, later manifesting into the progressive reduction of his followers/admirers (*Murid/Shagird*) among the Muslims in the successive centuries, despite the evidence that some of the Mughal emperors, rajas and Zamindars had come forward to bestow land grants to a number of the Kabir establishments during their reigns. Simultaneously, Kabir's origin to a Hindu family began to acquire the dominant version in the ensuing narratives on Kabir and his teachings, primarily consequent upon the shrinking number of admirers and followers among the Muslims, and partly because of the increasing Hinduization and the Brahmanization of his teachings in sectarian texts and institutions coming up in his name. As my study has not aimed at writing the history of the ideological progression within the Kabirpanth, I am not well

equipped, at this stage, to dwell at large on this contentious topic. However, I must mention that both within the Kabirpanth and the academic scholars, the birth of Kabir has come to occupy the most dominant theme presumably to wrap it into a mythic worldview, so much so that one cannot come to know the actual human birth of Kabir, in a social milieu beset with caste, creed and religion.

Existing evidences about the nascent *panth* of Kabir recorded during the sixteenth century, though very sketchy and short in details, persuade us to believe that centre of devotional activities had already been formed at more than one places beginning with the Chauras, the residential places where Kabir is said to have stayed for a considerable period, drawing common people from the neighboring areas, such as Kabir Chaura, Benares, and Kabir-Chaura, at Swargdwari area in Puri. My own discovery of the Persian Mazhar from the Satmalpur Kabir math lends credence to the fact that during Akbar's reign, *faqirs* seeking their association with Kabir had begun to draw favourable attention of the Mughal emperor. We have plenty of references of the Benares and Puri Kabir-Chaura's in the didactic texts of the Kabirpanth, said to have been compiled during the sixteenth century itself, such as *Kabir-Granthavalis* by Sundar Das, of whose manuscripts have been found both from Rajasthan and parts of the present Uttar Pradesh; and the *Bijak*. Both these texts are considered the most sacred text among these followers and academic scholars, believed to be compiled by Bhagwandas from Chatiya-Baraharawa, Champaran, Bihar, as well as several other sectarian texts written and published by the Dharamdasi branch of the Kabirpanth, emerging in the then Central provinces of the time.

These texts also indicate at the Kabir's sojourn to parts of Chhattisgarh, Madhya Pradesh, Gujarat, and Punjab, as evident also in 543 *Sakhis* of Kabir finding prominent place in the *Guru Granth Sahib*, so much so that a number of Kabirpanth followers among the Sikhs reaffirm that their *Sikkhi*, too had its initial roots within the broader teachings of Kabir, whose *sakhis* have outnumbered those of all other *bhagats* described in the sacred *Guru Granth Sahib*, originally compiled in 1604-05 by Guru Arjandev, the fifth Sikh Guru. Even as we have presently no definitive evidence to show the proximity of the origin of the both the Nanakpanth and Kabirpanth, we cannot deny that Kabir's teachings had wide and strong hold over those, at least, who had deemed these fit to enshrine in the Sikhs' sacred granth originally called the *Adi Granth*.

As has been described in the foregoing chapters, we have the most reliable reference of the existence of a Kabir tomb existing in Puri, Orissa, in the travelogue of J. B. Tavernier, written during the mid-seventeenth century. How can we then negate the fact that construction and the requisite resources for these monuments, being built in far-flung areas of medieval Hindoostan- Magahar, Puri, Rattanpur, Satmalpur, located in four different present states of modern India, may not have been possible without active and strong group working for the preservation and spread of the golden *vanis* and teachings of Kabir on a considerable scale? Around the same period, as I have discovered in the revenue documents of Aurangzeb's reign, Kabir Mazar, not only attracted Mughal emperor's attention, but also won his heart to successively acquire a grant of about 500 *bighas* of almost revenue-free arable lands to then caretakers of the Mazar for its upkeep. The same documents for the first time also



mentions the names of the succeeding generations in the family of Kabir, whose Mazar was then stated to be under the care of these successive members, but also facing the threat of land grabbing by the contesting local Hindu rajas in connivance with some Muslim associates with the Mazar active in the neighbourhood of Magahar. These *donnes* and functionaries, as mentioned in these texts, definitely constituted the active members of the *panth* which was widening its base and resources in varying parts of the Mughal India.

In the central part of India, the Baghel *vanshi* rajas of Bandhogarh, is said to have shown profound interest in welcoming Kabir, and Dharamdas, his prominent disciple belonging to this kingdom. Despite lack of clinching evidences and strong hostility prevailing within the panth against the Dharamdasi branch, named after the latter, we have definitive evidence to show that by the eighteenth century, Dharamdas' hereditary successors and the people associated with his mission, had produced wider ripples among common masses than any other groups of Kabir's followers across the country. In the Rajputana parts of the Mughal India, we have discovered that a few Rajput rajas had made considerable material contributions to the opening of such centres upto the present-day Chhattisgarh, Gujarat and its bordering areas of Maharashtra as well, such as; Rewa, Ratlanpur, Mandala, Singhori, Jamnagar, Pune, Nagpur and Aurangabad. Most of these centres had originally either been formed under the religious control of the Dharamdasi branch, already split into two main sub-branches led by the hereditary successors of Narayandas and Churamani Das, the two sons of Dharamdas, shifting its headquarters from one place to another, all through these centuries, partly due to

fratricidal infightings arising among some aspirants of the Acharya seat ( guru *gaddi*).

Internal tension within the other distinct branches of the Kabirpanth, too, seems have erupted within the Bhagatahi and the Jagodasi branches as well, although these branches claim to have followed the principle of selecting their heads of maths amongst the celibate (*brahmcharya*) Kabir devotees, unlike the Dharamdasi branch, in which the seat of Mahant has always been kept in the hand of the sons of the outgoing Mahants coming from the lineage of Dharamdas, except a few occasions. The Bhagatahi branch saw its earliest instance of the divide when its Dhanauti math successfully usurped the prominent position of the Chatiya-Baraharwa math by the mid-eighteenth century, both situated in the same Bhojpuri speaking cultural, linguistic zone of the old Champaran district. It is said that the Bettiah raj had major role in creating such rift within this branch as both these maths had already acquired a semblance of resourceful zamindars and had been posing a potential threat for the raj itself in this region. Traditionally it is said that Dhanauti math had emerged as the most prominent Bhagatahi math assuming the status of Acharya *gaddi* by the end of the eighteenth century, replacing the Chatiya-Baraharawa from the same.

The hostile forces took different shape in the case of the Jagodasi branch initially centred in Orissa. It was different in that it had to close its establishment in Cuttack and instead re-established it at Bidupur, a *qasba* near Hajipur town in Bihar from the mid-eighteenth century, which has been its headquarters since then till date.

As it has been happening with most of the religious movements, heterogeneous constituent groups under a single living guru

(*jinda pir*) have been able to overcome their internal diversities as long as the guru had been alive. The guru in the circumstances would play a role of the leveller; but immediately after his death, the concord thus created often began to loosen its gravitational force. The same fissiparous tendency had brought Kabir's followers within its grip as manifested since the time the dispute over the disposal of his dead body had erupted. It is further said that a number of Kabir associates began to object to Bhagwandas, the commonly accepted compiler of the *Bijak* among Kabirpanthis as well as scholars, who had kept the sacred *granth* in his own possession till it was finally codified, edited and circulated among the interested readers, presumably towards the end of the sixteenth century. Bhagwandas began to be known as 'Bhago' (one who fled away secretly with the *granth*), and the groups which kept on waiting for its release tended to distance from Bhagwandas and his emerging associates, precipitating the formation of a distinct Bhagwandasi branch of the panth, different from those which disapprove his acts of hiding the *Bijak* for several years in his personal custody.

While Kabir still continues to be the common *Sadguru* of all the followers associated with the Kabirpanth across the world, splitting tendency verging on many types of ideological and material issues, too continued unabated well into the present time. On the one hand, some of Mughal rulers and a number of Hindu rajas and zamindars showed their generousities towards Kabir Mazar and the Kabir Samadhi, in addition to a number of the centres of devotion growing as an integral part of the panth, as stated above, Muslims increasingly distanced themselves from the majority of the devotional centres that were mostly being run under the Hindu disciples at their helms. Elements of

division among the two distinct Hindu and Muslim disciples/admirers of Kabir came into open when a bloody episode had taken place at the site of Kabir Mazar, Magahar, presumably leading to the formation of a separate building called Kabir Samadhi within the same complex before the end of the eighteenth century, as the report of Francis Buchanan for the first time enumerates. He had noted that the Hindu establishment (*Samadhi*) in the Kabir Mazar complex having been built 'recently' in his early nineteenth century survey.

In other parts of India, Muslim associates of Kabir seems to have always remained a small group and showing their obeisance to Kabir at the local centres of devotion colloquially called in a very generic terms such as *Jagah*, *sthan*, *akhara*, *dera*, *ashram* and so on and so forth. However the centres which were getting royal favours materially or otherwise, began to develop as a full-fledged math or a temple (*mandir*) on already existing managerial pattern of *sagun* or Ramanandi centres of devotion of Ram, Shiva or Vishnu. The head of these resourceful centres began to adopt the title of Mahants for themselves as their counterparts were then called in *sagun* maths and *thakurwaris*. In addition, most of the resourceful Kabir maths began to depute some more subordinate functionaries such as *bhandari*, *Kothari* and *Kotwals* as well as *Pujari*.

At the same time, we have found that a number of such centres of devotion had been coming into existence till the end of the eighteenth century. Marco della Tomba's contemporary account of the 'Cabiristi', of the early part of the eighteenth century, pointed out the widespread followers and popularity of Kabir in the Champaran region of the Bihar. In fact, most of the present day resourceful maths within panthic tradition of Kabir, had their

origin during the heyday of the Mughal period. Sectarian literatures, prevailing legends, and didactic texts in addition to the *Gurumukhi*, *Kaithi*, *Marathi*, *Persian* documents we have collected, and oral traditions relating these devotional centres, provide us adequate evidence to delineate the emerging centres of devotion during the following centuries. For instance, the Kabir Chaura math, Kashi, and that of Puri, Bhagatahi branch's maths of Chatiya-Baraharwa, Tadhawa and Dhanauti; maths of the Dharamdasi branches-Narayandasi and Charandasi, mostly situated in the Baghelkhand, and Bundelkhand regions of Madhya Pradesh and Chhattisgarh, including the legendary Kabir Vad site of Bharuch, Kabir ashram of Jamnagar, Surat and Ahmedabad in the present Gujarat province, just to cite a few of prominent among them- all of these places saw opening of these centres before the end of the eighteenth century. Many of these till date have been reckoned as the most resourceful maths of the Kabirpanth.

Simultaneously, some of the earliest centres founded during this period either got merged with the leading centres named after their original founders; such as, Bhagwandas, Jagodas, Dharamdas, except the Kabir-Chaura math, which has till date remained known as the place where Kabir is said to have stayed for the major part of life, leading to the unchallenged view as if the site of Kabir-Chaura also encircls the site of his birth-place, or else many decayed into insignificance by that time due to several reasons. One of the most important factor that seems to have deeply affected the growth of the Kabirpanth, both during the medieval and the modern period, for good or bad, has been guiding principles that have remained associated with them since their inception, the topic that I have not dwelt on in this

book in details, most important among these being their commitment not to create a sectarian order in the name of Kabir covertly or overtly.

Without risking too much of digression, we must note the fact that the initiation of these distinct branches at varying places also was, in all probability, a marker of underlying mutual ideological disagreement with each other. The core points of disagreement in fact reflect upon their differing concerns towards the socio-religious problems the medieval Indian society, in general, had been facing, as expressed not just by Kabir, but also by many other saints and medieval authorities of the period. To cite a few concerns, Dharamdasi branch which appears to have been gaining wider popularity among the common masses, had decided to keep the seat of the head of the devotional centres of Kabir, within the family of Dharamdas and his successors, with utter disregard to the Brahmanical emphasis on the sacredness of the celibacy and *brahmcharya*. All its Mahants or Acharya Mahants have been householders both at their Acharya seat as well at the associated sub-branches. Unlike them, Acharya Gaddis of almost all the remaining branches of the *panth* followed the tenets of *brahmchaya* as the minimum criterion for the eligibility of their seats of Mahants. The adherence to the Brahmanical tradition presumably had been a potent factor in the lesser popularity of the latter among the common masses aggrieved of the greater tradition, living within their sphere of influence. Dharamdas and his successors coming from a *bania* community seems to have deeper appeals for the downtrodden members of *bania*, *sudra* and tribal communities particularly in the central part of medieval India.

Yet Kabirpanth's heterodoxy saw gradual dilution or modification of the *nirgun* principles of Kabir as it stepped further into parts of what presently constitutes Gujarat and Maharashtra. This dilution expressed partly in the rise of the Ram-Kabir tradition, and partly in the co-option of Ram as having been on equal pedestal as Kabir, in their centres of devotion. Major part of Gujarat in particular saw the dominant rise of the Ram-Kabir tradition, as a distinct form of Kabirpanth. The numbers of non-Ram Kabir centres in this region have always remained miniscule till date. However we cannot say with certainty that these Ram-kabir centres have been installing Ram's idols along with Kabir since their inception, as we cannot say when did the the first idol of Kabir itself was installed in a Kabir temple, an issue acquiring significance, as presently a sizable number of the Kabirpanth maths have come to have such idols in their sanctum sanctorum. I could not look into this aspect of the Kabirpanth adequately till date.

Before winding up, I must state that despite my best efforts, I could not adequately verify each of the evidences I have used in reconstructing the Kabirpanth's history partly due to time constraints and largely due to my lack of expertise such verifications require. Nonetheless, the enquiry into a religious tradition has always been beset with difficult challenges as it involves probing into the volatile sentiments of those who have been following its beliefs and rituals; questioning of their traditional beliefs beyond a point at times jeopardize the academic pursuits itself. Despite these limitations, I do realize that each of the Kabirpanth's earliest devotional centres, stated to have been in existence for about 500 years, requires an exclusive research project in order to clearly delineate its

objective history. As the geographical area of my research has covered larger part of our vast country, I did not succeed in providing a detailed history of each one of them. Instead I have been able to present before the academic scholars what I have gathered and learnt about the history of the Kabirpanth till date shrouded in legends and myths, coming out with some interesting facts that require further researches. Origin and growth of these centres of devotion also underscored the differing traditions that came to be associated with these branches.